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Factors Impacting Principals' Career Decision Making

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Leadership

by

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Abstract

Federal legislation and educational programs such as *No Child Left Behind* (2001) and *Race to the Top* (2009) identify school leaders as one of the major catalysts to improving academic achievement. Increasing accountability demands call for replacement of the principal when adequate gains in student achievement are not met, yet research indicates that it takes at least five years to affect change (Fullan, 2001). Why then would any principal *remain* in an appointment as principal in a chronically low-performing school?

New principals generally stay no more than five to ten years in any one position (Dancy, 2007; NAESP, 1998). In several states, the average tenure rate for a new principal is just 4.5 years (Fuller, 2009). One of the key reasons principals leave is the stress related to the job responsibilities (Groff, 2001; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2007; Ponder & Crow, 2005). Moreover, principal vacancies are expected to increase vastly within the next three to five years as more than a third of our nation's teachers and school leaders are ready for retirement (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). With looming principal shortages, regular job turnover, and threat of replacement for current principals, who will lead the nation's lowest-performing schools and what are the characteristics of those who intentionally seek to do so?

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of four factors associated with Krumboltz's (1979) social learning theory of career decision making-- (1) personal characteristics, (2) work environment, (3) learning experience, and (4) task skills – on principals' intent to stay or leave the profession of principalship when employed in a low-performing school.

This study used data from 125 school administrators throughout the state of Louisiana who currently serve in schools considered “failing” by state standards in order to answer the following general questions:

1. To what extent do the four factors of Krumboltz’s social learning theory of career decision making (personal characteristics, environment, formal learning experiences and task skills) combine to predict principals’ intent to stay in the role of principal in a low-performing school in Louisiana?
2. What is the relative contribution of each of these factors in predicting principals’ intent to stay?

A quantitative, correlational survey design was used to assess the factors that influence principals’ intent to leave or stay in the position of principal in low-performing schools throughout Louisiana. A modified version of the *Principal Shortage Survey* utilized in a previous study to analyze the principal shortage in Massachusetts (2006) was used. The surveys were administered electronically. Multiple regression was used to analyze results, using SPSS version 19.0. In general, the study supported Krumboltz’s theory, with learning experiences as a significant predictor of principal’s intent to stay. Principals who perceived their professional development as most effective were more likely to indicate a desire to remain in the principalship. Implications for accountability, principal training, and leadership in low-performing schools are discussed.

(Keywords: *principal retention; principal mobility; principal intent to stay; low-performing schools*)

Chapter One

Introduction

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2007) indicated that nearly half of the nation's school districts surveyed reported a shortage of principal applicants. In many cases, candidates hold all the necessary certifications to become a principal, but are not willing to commit to such a challenging job, especially in schools that have performed poorly on accountability measures (Fuller & Young, 2009). They also found an impact on principal tenure length. Principals in higher performing schools remained in their role, on average, 5.62 years compared to low performing schools at 4.32 years. Faced with a possible principal turnover crisis within the next decade due to retirement, coupled with school districts' difficulty in attracting qualified principals into low-performing schools, it is important to understand the various factors related to leader retention.

From a broader perspective, much of the literature on principal retention to date provides insight into factors that influence the retention of principals overall (i.e., inadequate compensation, too much time required, increased stress, and lack of support) (NAESP, 1998; Fuller & Young, 2009; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Tucker & Moran, 2002; Zeitoun & Newton, 2002). However, as education policy in America focuses increasingly on schools that demonstrate poor student achievement over time and the principals who lead these schools, it is important to determine more specifically why principals who work in low-performing schools would intend to stay or leave such a demanding job, a job that may be terminated if the school does not improve within a specified, stringent timeline.

The transiency of principals has been cited as an issue that may become problematic for school systems. According to a National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) summary of findings from a 2008-2009 *Principal Attrition and Mobility Survey* of 117,140 principals across the nation, the attrition and mobility rate is about 20%. The attrition and mobility rate is inclusive of principals who were “movers” (i.e., moved to another school) and “leavers” (i.e., left the profession completely). Twenty percent turnover might not be considered a high rate for one academic school year, but if this trend were to continue, along with the departure of the 40% of principals who are now within retirement age, this instability in leadership could be catastrophic. Additionally, high principal turnover is directly aligned with low teacher retention rates. Length of principal tenure is highly correlated with school success. Changes in leadership can cause a decline in previous achievements due to a need to rebuild relationships and school culture (Hargreaves, 2005; MacMillan et al., 2004; Plecki et al., 2005; Vanderhaar et al. 2006).

Weinstein et al. (2009) synthesized the impact of principal transitions in schools. The research tells us that unstable, unpredictable school environments and leadership transitions contribute to the fragmentation of the organizational goals of achievement. Weinstein et al. (2009) surveyed 80 public high school principals in New York City. The average principal tenure was 3.4 years and no principal remained at a school for longer than 4.7 years. After one school experienced a principal leaving for the initial time, the effect size on student outcomes was -0.98. However, upon the school receiving a third leader, the effect size on student outcomes was -5.52. The researcher concluded that loss of three or more principals can be linked to significant decreases in student achievement levels. Ultimately, the constant changing of principals in a school is not the answer to improving schools. Thus, the key to improved student achievement is to ensure that principals remain in their position by developing the skills to

improve student achievement. This study addresses leadership training and school performance scores as indicators of principals' intent to stay.

For the purposes of this study, if the principals' intend to leave the profession of principalship overall or move to a higher performing school, they were considered as ~~leavers~~.” However, if they intend to remain in the same or another low-performing school, they were considered as ~~stayers~~.”

Justification for Study

In spite of the recent focus on the positive impact of the principal on school success (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2005; Spinella, 2003; Waters & McNulty, 2003), there are nationwide accounts of a dwindling pool of principals (Bell, 2001; Groff, 2001; Fuller & Young, 2008; Mititello & Behnke, 2006; Zeiton & Newton, 2002). Reports have shown that new principals are intending to stay in the profession more than five to ten years (Dancy, 2007; Fuller & Young, 2008). Nationally, 40% of principals are nearing retirement and waiting to exit the profession (Dancy, 2007). More than 50% of all districts surveyed reported shortages in their labor pool for K-12 principal positions (NAESP, 1998). In several states, the average tenure rate for a new principal is just 4.5 years (Fuller & Young, 2009). Unfortunately, principal shortages are being cited as a problem across many districts in America.

Why are there such great shortages? Several explanations have been offered for this substantial increase in principal vacancies. Within the past decade, a national survey of superintendents indicated that the three most consistent reasons an educator would *not* consider principalship as a career or would leave the profession were (1) the job was too stressful (58% of

respondents), (2) it required too much time (53% of respondents), and (3) compensation was insufficient when compared to responsibilities (37% of respondents) (NAESP, 2007). With the growing expectations for student achievement, many fear that the new role of the principal is massive and increasingly complex, often including responsibilities that are "more than one person can handle" (Groff, 2001, p. 2). Several researchers conclude that the job responsibilities of the principal have increased within the past 30 years and have become a major challenge for many leaders today, often making the job unsustainable (Davies, 2007; Fuller & Young, 2009; Ponder & Crow, 2005).

Educational leaders must now consider accountability as a new factor in the increasingly complex task list for principals. Due to a decade of new federal and state accountability policies, principals not only face the usual job overload inherent with the supervision of up to 100 adults and hundreds (or thousands) of children, but now also face the threat of removal should their students' academic achievement not improve to a standard established in state accountability policies. In fact, the \$4.5 billion allocation for the federal *Race to the Top* initiative (the largest funded grant program in history), calls for the release of the principal if the school does not meet the established annual yearly goal (United States Department of Education, 2010). In Louisiana, 75 is the standard School Performance Score (SPS) that a school must attain by 2012 in order to be removed from the *Academically Unacceptable School* (SPS 0-65) or *Academic Watch* (SPS 65-74.9) lists. If the school does not meet or exceed this score in a three- to five-year period, the school can be considered for "takeover" by the State Department of Education which usually means dismissal of the principal and staff. Unfortunately, while current stipulations allow for easier removal of principals, they do not take into account the research that indicates that three to five years of a consistent reform model (e.g., transformational, turnaround) are necessary to yield

significant achievement results. Principals in low-performing schools may not have the opportunity to significantly grow their school before they are asked to step down from their position, leaving an endless cycle of new principals and new initiatives with little to no sustained school improvement efforts.

With the added pressure of accountability, are principals inclined to shorten their tenures even further, exacerbating the looming principal shortage? Currently, there is a gap in the literature as it relates to factors that influence principals' intent to stay in the profession if they are assigned to or decide to work in a low-performing school. This study was intended to gain a deeper understanding of principals' intent to remain or leave the role of principalship in a low-performing school. Such knowledge could assist policymakers in creating realistic job demands and support for principals to meet the expectations of the role, especially in schools with a history of low achievement. The results of this research could offer plausible solutions to improving attrition, mobility, and retention rates of principals in traditionally low-performing schools. As mentioned earlier, principals are not remaining an extended amount of time in low-performing schools (Fuller & Young, 2009; Horng, Kalogrides, and Loeb, 2010). The research shows a there is an impact between school success and leadership, as it is only 2nd to the role of the classroom teacher (Leithwood, 2005). If school performance levels are to consistently increase, principals' intent to remain in low performing schools for more than five years must be examined.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study of principal's intent to stay in low-performing schools is Krumboltz's *social learning theory of career decision making* (SLTCDM)

(Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1979; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990). In 1979, Krumboltz, Mitchell, and Jones connected Bandura's social learning theory (1977) with career decision making. Bandura proposed that a person's learning experiences are enhanced through a series of examinations, replications, and modeling. The theory explains human behavior as a reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors that are observed, learned, and performed. By 1990, Krumboltz and Mitchell refined their career decision making theory into four categories termed *influencers* that explain the process of career decision making. Krumboltz explains career decision making as a way to identify the interaction(s) between these influencers: (1) genetic factors, (2) environmental conditions, (3) learning experiences, and (4) task skills. For the purposes of this study, genetic characteristics will be termed personal characteristics to avoid confusion with the biological definition. Together, these factors produce ~~movement~~ along one career path to another" (Chapman, 1984, pp. 645-646). The different combinations of these influencers can create various interactions and produce a multitude of different career choices (Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1979; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990). This would include an individual's decision to stay in or leave a profession.

In summary, Krumboltz's four influencers are described as the following (1) genetic endowment and special abilities- an individual's genetic and special abilities can influence their career decisions. They can include race, gender, height, weight, musical, artistic, and athletic abilities. (2) environmental conditions and events- individuals are influenced by the environment in which they exist. Factors that control career decisions may be of human origin or natural forces. Typically these factors are outside of the control of the person. Economic situations, social, cultural, and political forces, training opportunities, and labor laws are examples of human origin factors. Weather conditions and natural resources are examples of natural forces factors.

(3)learning experiences-an individual's learning process is influenced by all previous learning experiences that result in career choice. Krumboltz recognizes two learning experience types: (a) instrumental learning – individual acting on environment for certain learning outcomes. (b) associative learning – individual reacting to stimuli, observation, or comparing events which promote learning. (4)task approach skills-when an individual engages in a new task, certain skills are utilized. In order to successfully complete the new task, the individual may use skills such as work habits, performance standards, and perceptive skills.

As shown in the figure below, the conceptual framework posits that an individual comes into the environment with certain genetic characteristics. The environment produces learning experiences through exposure to various cultural, social, and economic events. The new learning will produce action by individuals. They will evaluate their actions and performance abilities, and then decisions will be made based upon the successes or failures of their actions, or the negative or positive perceptions of their learning experiences. As a precept, task skills and environmental conditions will interact with learning experiences and thus, personal characteristics. The interactions amongst these influencers will influence the career decision of an individual (see Figure 1). This process is continuous due to the constant changes in environment and in the individuals themselves.

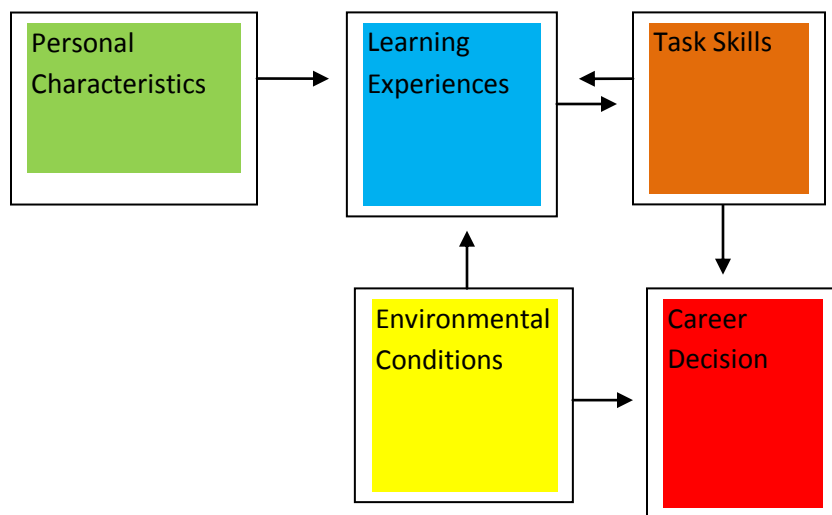


Figure 1. Conceptual Map: Influences Associated with Principal Intent to Stay. Based on Krumboltz (1990).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing principals' intent to stay or leave the principalship when employed in low-performing schools in Louisiana. There is minimal research on the topic of principals working in low-performing schools that examines personal characteristics, formal learning experiences, environment, and task skills. The objective of this study was to extend the knowledge base in educational literature in this regard. The results of this research can offer insight into the reasons a principal might be willing to remain in the principalship role.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study:

1) To what extent do the four factors of Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making (personal characteristics, environment, formal learning experiences and task skills) combine to predict principals' intent to stay in the role of principal in a low-performing school in Louisiana?

2) What is the relative contribution of each of these factors in predicting principals' intent to stay?

Overview of Methodology

A quantitative, correlational survey research design was used to assess the factors that influence principals' intent to stay in low-performing schools in Louisiana. One hundred twenty-five (125) principals in Louisiana's lowest-performing schools (Louisiana Department of Education, 2010) participated in this study. The *Principal Intent to Stay or Leave Survey* was designed by the researcher and reviewed prior to the actual study for face and content validity through use of a panel of experts. The researcher contacted 220 individuals via email and telephone to solicit their participation in this study in spring 2012, with the goal of attaining a 75% response rate. The actual response rate for this study was 57%. This response rate excludes the 10 individuals out of the 135 total who clicked the link but did not complete the survey. The lower response rate could have been caused by several of the principals not having a full-year of experience working in a low performing school. A question on the survey was included to eliminate these individuals. Multiple regression was used to determine the relative predictive strength of each of the Krumboltz factors on principals' intended career decisions.

Research Implications

The results of this research are valuable in understanding a number of reasons why current principals may opt not to remain in the principalship in low-performing schools. The results of this study indicated that on-the-job training was a significant predictor of principal intent to stay. Additionally, the school performance score was also found to be a good predictor of principals' intent to stay. These findings can assist districts in retaining principals and help re-conceptualize the roles and responsibilities of the principal to create a more realistic job description. Additionally, induction and preparation programs for new principals could be designed to ensure principals acquire the skills and knowledge needed to manage and lead historically low-performing schools effectively. Finally, plans to resolve many of the challenges principals encounter working in low-performing schools could be drafted to increase the likelihood that principals will remain in the position.

Summary

Unfortunately, removing principals each time test scores decrease or increase insufficiently could be detrimental to long-term achievement and institutional stability, especially given that research indicates the need for three to five years before change can take effect (Fullan, 2001; Fuller & Young, 2009; Marzano, R., Waters, T., & McNulty, B., 2005). The tremendous stress caused by federal and state test mandates could increase the likelihood of principals leaving the profession and add to the predicted shortage in the near future. An understanding of the factors that impact principals' career decisions could lead to more supportive district policies for those principals who agree to work in low-performing schools, as well as influence national policies such as No Child Left Behind. This legislative act insists that

all students in America, despite any subgroup categories (i.e., race, gender, special needs), are to reach standard academic levels set by each state by 2014. However, it neglects to include policies on how to fairly and equitably evaluate schools with subgroups such as special education and low-income that research shows typically have the largest achievement gap. Also, there is a lack of clarity on the necessary district and parent support that must be provided to principals who lead these types of schools in order for it to be successful. These improvements in policy could create school labels for growth that depict a accurate picture of school success and increase the number of principals who would remain.

Definition of Terms

Louisiana Academically Unacceptable School (AUS) - a school is considered “academically unacceptable” if its School Performance Score (SPS) is below the state-set threshold of 60 (Boston Consulting Group, 2007, p. 11).

Principal Attrition - the degree to which principals leave the profession as principal or move to another n non-principal position at any point in their career.

Principal Candidate - a person with appropriate licensure and qualifications to attain the job of principal.

Principal Intention - the intent of the principal to remain on the job, working in the same capacity, as principal in the same school

Principal Recruitment - the solicitation of eligible principal candidates to work as a principal in a district.

Principal Retention - The extent to which a principal remains on the job, working in the same capacity, as principal in the same school.

Principal Shortage - Insufficient number of qualified candidates to fill the principal vacancies within a district.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The following chapter is a review of the literature on the (1) overview of accountability systems, (2) factors related to principals' intent to stay in the profession, particularly in low-performing schools, (3) the need for effective principals, especially in low-performing schools, (4) principal shortage as a predicted problem further exacerbated by high turnover of principals, (5) efforts to ensure effective principals remain, and (6) the context for study -- Louisiana's lowest-performing schools.

Accountability Systems and Low-Performing Schools

National school reform policies have been one avenue to improving schools across our nation. Some of the major educational reform efforts in America include the *National Defense Education Act of 1958*, the *1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, and its initiatives such as *Goals 2000* and *Race to the Top*, and the reauthorization as the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* in 2001. Unfortunately, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) still indicates slow progression towards academic improvement across the nation, ranking our students 14th among 34 other countries in reading, 17th in science, and 25th in mathematics (Office for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2011).

In 2001, NCLB required all states to adopt and amend all accountability measures to align with federal requirements in order to continue receiving federal funding. This was done in an effort to improve school quality and compete with our international peers. To this end, all 50 states across America have been designing, implementing, and evaluating educational accountability measures for nearly a decade. Within the last 30 years, significant education

reform was launched with a *Nation at Risk* (1983) which compared low educational standards to an act of war. Subsequent reports by the National Education Association (1995) and the National Education Goals (2000) chastised educators for student performance drastically below at least 14 other countries in the areas of mathematics, science, and literacy.

The indicators for measuring school performance that are outlined in state accountability policies vary from state to state. However, most state reform includes rigorous grade-level content standards, assessments aligned to those content standards, performance standards, and, in some cases, rewards for meeting the performance targets (Barton, 2009).

Historically, educational reform efforts have included that state funding be awarded if federal compliance requirements have been met (National Conference of State Legislature, 2010). Therefore, in an attempt to directly link student achievement to schools, standards-based accountability systems were designed to hold schools accountable for their work and performance, particularly in schools that receive federal funding. Within this type of system, performance standards can be utilized for federal, state, and local agencies to set goals, evaluate the attainment of the goals, and hold personnel accountable for achievement of goals. While accountability targets have been set for school-based stakeholders, the function of the state and federal government in education has shifted more to compliance and monitoring. This ultimately leaves the school-site members to be accountable for achieving state standards, increasing attendance, and decreasing dropout rates as states work toward the NCLB goal of 100% of all students attaining proficiency levels by 2014, despite subgroup categories.

The implementation of school performance standards allow for communication of academic expectations, guidelines for increase or decrease in funding, elicit positive or negative

consequences for students and staff, and hold all stakeholders accountable for performance. Labels in many states include A to F, academically unacceptable to four star ratings, and numerical scores such as 120.

In the state of Louisiana, *Bulletin 111: The Louisiana School, District, and State Accountability System*, calls for ongoing improvement of student achievement, attendance, and dropout rates. The system is founded upon two main principles: (1) highlighting schools that make adequate academic growth targets and gains, and (2) supporting and providing resources to schools that need additional assistance. In 1997, the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) signed into law the Louisiana accountability system that annually tests 3rd through 12th grade students using norm-referenced and criterion-referenced standardized tests. The outcome of the tests determines the promotion of 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students, as well as school, district, and state performance labels. The labels are assigned based upon the School Performance Score (SPS) that each school receives. The SPS is calculated in grades 3 through 6 by 90% achievement and 10% attendance. In 7th and 8th grades, the calculation consists of 90% achievement, 5% attendance, and 5% dropout. Finally, high school calculation consists of 70% achievement and 30% graduation rate. In accordance with the goals set forth by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, Louisiana established a target expectation in 1999 that every school in the state would achieve a School Performance Score (SPS) of 120 or higher by the year 2014. As of spring 2011, it had not reached 50% of this goal. Between the years 2005 through 2010, schools had to maintain a 60 SPS or above in order to be removed from an Academically Unacceptable list. However, BESE began to increase the accountability levels each year, starting in 2011, in an effort to reach the ultimate goal of 120 SPS for all schools by 2014. In 2010-2011, schools below SPS 65 were considered Academically Unacceptable and received a letter grade of F. In the

2011-2012 school year, an increase of 10 raised the SPS expectation to 75. Each year the school remains in AUS, it must implement additional remediation plans to improve academic performance; remediation may include Data Assistance Teams, supplemental educational services, school choice, and school takeover. With the annual increase in growth targets of 10 points, hundreds of schools, in Louisiana may be facing a failing school label. For the purposes of this study, low-performing schools are defined as Academically Unacceptable or Academic Watch schools. For the 2010-2011 school year, more than 200 schools were considered either Academically Unacceptable (i.e., SPS of below 60) or on the Academic Watch list (i.e., SPS of 60.1 to 74.9) (Louisiana Department of Education, 2010). Such rigorous academic targets have never been imposed upon school leaders in Louisiana. Will this increase the likelihood of principals wanting to remain in low-performing schools? This study investigates factors that predict principal's intent to stay.

Factors Related to Principals' Intent to Stay in the Principalship

Low-performing schools as a factor. Several new administrators who were recently inducted into the role of principal have found the job to be overwhelming and are unable to continue in that role for more than five years (Fuller and Young, 2009; NAESP, 1998). Several factors impact principal attrition, mobility, retention, and turnover. Most commonly mentioned effects in the literature include salary, time spent on job, and stress related to the job. More recently there has been a greater focus on low-performing schools and the characteristics of the student body (e.g., poverty, minority, etc.) within these schools as factors affecting retention of principals. Although the literature on the overall topic of principals' intent to remain in the profession has not been fully developed, the findings from five studies of principal attrition shared one common finding, the fact that low-performing schools, high-poverty schools, and

schools with large numbers of minority students, experience the highest turnover compared to other schools with different demographics (Batelle, 2010; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2009; Cullen & Mazzeo, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2005; Papa, 2007; Weinstein et al., 2009). Through study of longitudinal administrative data, these studies have been able to show a trend of principals leaving low-performing, high-poverty, and minority schools at a much faster rate than high-achieving schools with the lowest numbers of poverty and minority students.

Horng, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2010) examined the principal labor market and principal preferences across different types of schools. They used Miami-Dade County Public School District data from 2003-04 and 08-09 of principal and assistant principal surveys and the Common Core Data from the Florida Education Department to consider the patterns in the principal labor market and the level at which school characteristics played a role in motivating a principal to stay or leave a school. More than 350 schools and their principals and assistant principals were observed over a six-year timeframe. The data analysis revealed that the schools with the largest proportion of low-income students had the highest turnover. In fact, in low-income schools, 20% of first-year principals left, as compared to 11% in schools with fewer poor students. Reviewing the data set from any given school year, schools with failing accountability labels of D or F had, on average, principals with 2.5 years of experience, compared to 5.1 years on average for schools receiving a label of A. This indicated high-achieving schools were either able to retain their principals for five years or more or they are able to attract the more experienced principal. Also, about 17 percent low-achieving/high-poverty schools, had to use a temporary principal on at least one occasion opposed to just five percent of high-achieving/lower-poverty schools. In higher-performing schools, 80 percent of principals hired

remained after three years of service, compared to only 60 percent in the lowest-achieving schools.

Using data from 1995 to 2008, Fuller and Young (2009) studied 1,504 principals who were new to a school. They found that newly hired Texas principal retention rates for first-year principals were “strongly influenced” by the achievement levels of the school and the lowest-achieving schools had the highest turnover rate. The differences were essentially more than one year between the lowest- and highest-performing schools, with 5.62 years of principal tenure in high-performing schools for elementary grades, compared to 4.32 years of tenure in schools with the lowest poverty levels. Secondly, “the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in a school also has a strong influence on principal tenure and retention rates, with principals in highest poverty schools (i.e., 75.1%-100.0%) having shorter tenure and lower retention rates than principals in low-poverty schools (0.00%-25.0%)” (Fuller & Young, 2009, p. 3) Actually, the principal tenure differed for the principal who worked in the high-poverty schools by more than three quarters of one year for elementary and middle schools and at least one year for high schools. Finally, the researchers found that tenure rates for all newly-hired, first-year principals were less than five years.

Another related study of principal retention sought to analyze the most common reasons principals change schools (Papa et al., 2007). The researcher used an empirical model to evaluate principal traits, organizational structure, culture, and situational context within the school. The two administrative data sets were obtained from the New York State Education Department: The Personnel Management File and the Institutional Master File for the years 1968 through 2002. To analyze principal retention of newly-hired principals, data were examined from 1991 and

1999. One of the findings related to principal turnover in schools with greater proportions of minority students showed that ~~on~~ on average across the state, the likelihood of losing a principal to another school is approximately twice as great for schools with higher poverty levels in which the value of any one of these measures is 1 standard deviation above the mean as compared to schools with lower socioeconomic status in which the value of the measure is 1 standard deviation below the mean” (Papa et al., 2007, p. 19).

Therefore, schools with more disadvantaged students were less likely to retain the principals in place. This study builds on this knowledge by examining factors such as, socioeconomic status, to predict principal’s intent to stay in the profession. This study found that a majority of the low-performing schools were also schools with high poverty levels (88%). Although the results for this study did not indicate that poverty could predict principals’ intent to stay, school performance scores did show a significant finding. Thus, working in a low-performing school will often consequentially mean high numbers of students from a low-socioeconomic status. Principals’ leading in low performing schools are indicating they intend to stay, in general, no more than three years.

Similarly, Baker, Punswick, and Belt (2010) explored school leadership stability and principal moves and departures by reviewing administrative datasets from Missouri Public Schools. The datasets were from about 2,700 public school principals in the years 1999-2006. The objective of the study was to investigate the movement of principals (a) if the principal left altogether, (b) made first move to another school, or (c) made second move to another school, based upon principal backgrounds, school characteristics, and school-level factors. While financial increases did associate with length of time remaining on the job as principal, the

authors still determined that racial composition, especially black race, contributed to instability and increased chance that principals would make a second move (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010).

Overall, a synopsis of the literature reveals that attrition and mobility rates are greater in schools that are considered low-performing. Particularly for principals who either were assigned to a low-performing school or chose such a challenging task, addressing the pressures of meeting annual accountability measures established by state policy is a daunting tasks that may quickly discourage the new principal. Often, when these state standards are not attained, the principal is removed or decides to leave for fear of removal. This study examines factors correlated with principals' intent to stay or leave under these difficult conditions.

The results of the surveys from various states identify four major areas impacting principal retention: location of school, length of work day, salary, and stress related to the job responsibilities. The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) database shows that an overwhelming number of principals in Louisiana will be eligible to retire in the next five to ten years (LDOE, 2009). This looming shortage justifies an investigation of the factors related to retention of Louisiana school principals.

Length of work day as a factor. As of April 2001, NAESP reported that, on average, a principal's work year is about 20% longer than that of teachers; principals typically work nine-hour days and 54-hour weeks. Many spend an additional eight hours a week supporting students in extra-curricular activities (NAESP, 2001; www.ncsl.org, 2007). Evening and weekend events are common. These are daunting statistics; even 30 years ago, principals reported average 50-hour work weeks (Protheroe, 2008).

Salary as a factor. In addition to long work hours, compensation repeatedly has been shown in the literature as a factor influencing principals' decisions to remain on the job or future teacher candidates' choice to become a school principal. Often, the salaries for new principals can be as little as ten percent more than veteran or master teachers (NAESP, 1998). Additionally, after averaging in the longer contract periods, extended work hours, and attendance at periodic weekend events, the average daily pay rate may be less for the principal than for highly experienced teachers. The average mean salary nationally, according to ERS is \$74,415 for elementary school principals (Cooke & Licciardi, 2008). The average salary for a veteran teacher or master teacher is about \$50,000. When taking into account the time expended on the job and the pressures associated with the job, several principals have compensation high on their list of complaints.

In contrast to the national salary mean, New Orleans, Louisiana, post-Hurricane Katrina has drastically increased the salaries of its principals. As a result of the storm, the educational reform movement included establishing charter schools across the city and creating competitive salaries for school leaders. Effective leadership was sought by charter boards in an effort to increase student achievement. Recently, a local *Times Picayune* (2009) newspaper article reported annual school principal salaries ranging from an estimated \$80,000 to \$110,000 across the New Orleans area, which is considerably more than the national average for school principal salaries. This is a vast difference in salary when compared to an average \$50,000 prior to the storm in 2005. For New Orleans school principals, compensation may no longer be an issue influencing principal retention.

Job stress related to expanded responsibilities of the principal as a factor. A

principal with more than 30 years of experience in education stated that when he started his career, “things were much simpler” (Groff, 2001, p. 1). The 3 R’s, reading, writing, and arithmetic, may have been the primary focus of that principal. As a matter of fact, in the early 1900s the principal began as the job of “teacher-principal” (Bell, 2001; Protheroe, 2008, p. 48). A chronological review of the field conducted by Murphy in 1993 showed that the models for educational administration were drawn from industry which placed an emphasis on “fact gathering and empirical generalizations” (English, 1996, p. 3). The goals were to groom “scientifically trained” administrators who could be prepared for any situation or context they would encounter, ultimately making them the ideal professionals who could compete with other practitioners in other fields (English, 1996, p. 3). Despite the efforts of many researchers for more than two decades to create a consistent, acceptable, and practical definition of an effective leader, it was too difficult to find concepts that would be varied enough to incorporate any type of leader or situation (Foster, 1986). Thus, without a concrete definition of what was expected of a school leader, administrators designed their own job responsibilities which typically included supervision of teachers, managing the school facilities, and attending to public relations (Cuban, 1988). An ethnography was conducted in 1973 to describe and analyze the elementary school principalship through observation and recording of the daily routines of a principal. The observation records of one school principal from 1966 to 1968 indicated the principal spent the typical day on the job in a “series of endless informal and formal encounters that can include, but are not limited to, prearranged faculty, parent, and board meetings; telephone conferences; preparing special reports, newsletters, staff bulletins; communications; campaigns for raising money; and sponsoring productions, organizations and programs” (Walcott, 2003, p. 88). As

stated by Walcott (2003, p. 88), “schools of today seem more businesslike than when conducted in the 1960s, with far more concern for measurable results and responsibilities toward custodial care, and less concern on the whole child.”

The new educational focus has been results-oriented. Today’s principal has much higher expectations to live up to as demanded by societal changes, the economy, and political forces. The new cadre of principals must have the talents required to cope with administrative tasks, instructional leadership, and technological management of the school simultaneously (Zeitoun & Newton, 2002). In 1958, 17% of principals reported they were “teaching principals” (Protheroe, 2008, p. 48). In 1998, only 1% labeled their job descriptions as such (Protheroe, 2008). The more current job description entails visioning, school culture building, meeting diverse needs of all students, teachers, and parents, designing curriculum and instructional plans for multiple grade levels, maintaining school facilities, managing staff reports, sending daily communications, writing and managing grants, maintaining financial budget, and ensuring the overall well-being of the school (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006). Additionally, since *No Child Left Behind* was enacted in 2001, the term *accountability* has left one of the largest imprints in the evolution of the role of principal to date. The standards for student academic achievement have been raised, often creating an environment of tension and stress for principals when their school’s performance is rated negatively (Militello & Behnke, 2006). For example, in Louisiana, students participate in a high-stakes standardized test at the 4th, 8th, and high school levels. An accountability regulation such as this automatically prioritizes increasing student test scores as the principal’s daily. Additionally, school principals must maintain high attendance and low dropout rates to receive an additional 10 points toward their School Performance Scores in Louisiana. This, once again, creates a role change to include the principal as expert in test-

taking strategies, test preparation materials, constructs of standardized tests, interpreting test scores, training of teachers on grade-level content and delivery of instruction, mentoring teachers, modeling lessons, attendance motivation and incentive strategies, and, in general, being involved in more instructional responsibilities than managerial. The principals' role during the last decade has expanded beyond what has typically been expected by previous principals.

It is logical to believe that when accountability measures are not met, the stress of poor performance in a school wherein the public views the principal as the failed instructional leader is often untenable. In a focus group conducted with three principals from New Orleans schools, when asked of the factors that would contribute to their decision to leave the profession, all three principals perceived low achievement scores as a “blemish” on themselves as they felt ultimately responsible for the achievement levels of the school. Moreover, they felt that if low performance continued, they would have to exit (Sorapuru, 2009). Obviously, high accountability standards that are not met are stress-inducing and may have an impact on principals' self-efficacy, perceptions of their ability to perform the job, job dissatisfaction, and, ultimately, retention.

The Expanded Role of the Principal

A study conducted by Doud and Keller (1998) investigated the expansion of the role and responsibilities of the principal for the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). The principals in the study were asked to rate the direction of the changes (increase, no change, decrease) that have occurred over the past three years as it relates to the roles and responsibilities of the principal. There were eleven different principal job responsibility areas assessed: curriculum development, development of instructional practices, fiscal decision-making, personnel selection, personnel evaluation, working with site-based

council/constituencies, planning/implementation of site-based staff development, attention to issues of potential legal liability, working with social service agencies, marketing/politics to generate support for the school and education, and participation in district policy development. Slightly more than half of the principals reported no change in their responsibilities in three areas: personnel selection (56.5%), personnel evaluation (55.8%), and participation in district policy development (55.0%). In contrast, more than half of the principals reported increases in the level of their responsibilities for the other eight areas, with the greatest proportion (70.0%) for marketing/politics to generate support for school and education.

It would be very hard to contest the assertion that within the last ten years the principal's role has become complex. States have offered several models to revise the more traditional principal model and support the expanding school leaders' responsibilities. For example, the *co-principal model* houses two principals within one school site. One principal may oversee the management activities and the other would assume the role of instructional leader. *The principal/business manager model* involves delegation of management duties to a business manager while the principal retains the responsibility as instructional leader. In the *multi-principal model* (Ashford, 2000), there is a lead principal who is responsible for instructional leadership, community relations, staff development, custodial maintenance, teacher evaluations, etc. The curriculum principal works alongside the lead principal to supervise grade-level principals who work with teachers and students of a particular grade level. Two models proposed by the Principal's Center at Harvard University are the *principal/associate principal model* and the *principal teacher/principal administrator model* (Pierce, 2001). The principal/associate model proposes that the principal be in charge of instructional leadership and the associate principal be in charge of management such as transportation, facilities monitoring,

parent concerns, purchasing, and meals. The principal teacher/principal administrator model places the principal teacher in charge of personnel, curriculum, technology, and overall student achievement. The principal administrator would be responsible for most management duties (Zeitoun & Newton, 2002).

The restructuring of roles and responsibilities to lighten the workload of school principals is one response to the outcry for principals' support and retention. Yet, none of the models are widely used. Also, mentoring of principals has not yielded enough research-based results to demonstrate success of most mentoring programs on principal retention. Furthermore, salary compensation has been addressed through increased wages. However, new principals are still staying only 4 to 5 years and retention still needs improvement. Unfortunately, high focus on recent accountability measures only increases the likelihood that stress levels and time spent on the job will grow. Finally, with or without the support needed from varying governance structures, principals are the leaders of the school and must account for all gains and losses in the building, which often can lead to them being the first persons in line for being fired. The gap in the literature as it relates to principal retention over the past 10 years includes accountability, charter schools, and autonomy in low-performing schools. It is essential to further investigate additional factors associated with principals' intent to stay as the prerequisite to ensuring principal tenure is elongated.

The Need for Effective Principals: The Impact of Leadership on Schools

There is a widely-used phrase by educators, "behind the doors of every great school, there is an effective principal" (Educational Alliance at Brown University, 2003, p. 3). As referred to by the Southern Region Education Board's (SREB) *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education,

effective leaders are important in creating effective schools. If we expect schools to be high-achieving, we need principals who can lead them to improved results.

As student achievement is the priority of every school in our country, it becomes essential that good leaders be in place. According to the United States Department of Education (2005), the United States as an entire educational system is performing significantly below the international average in mathematics and reading, with more than 40% of the student population below expected levels. The current state of education calls for teachers and principals who are capable of meeting the needs of a very diverse student population.

Nearly 30 years of research outlines the impact of the principal on school success (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The research to date has shown that the leadership of a school principal is a key determining factor in school effectiveness, second only to the role of a student's classroom teacher (American Education Statistics, 1998; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et.al., 2005). Many scholars believe that principals indirectly impact student achievement through positive interactions with teachers and students and the shaping of the school's culture (Hallinger, Bickman & Davis, 1996; Deal & Peterson, 1998). Research findings also indicate that an effective principal can account for at least two standard deviations in increased student achievement of students (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). In fact, ~~a~~ one standard deviation improvement in leadership practices is associated with an increase in student achievement from the 50th percentile to the 60th percentile" (Cromley, Kerr, Meister, Patterson, & Woods, 2005, p. 3). In 2003, Leithwood conducted a study that concluded the leadership of the principal accounts for about 20% of the school's impact on student achievement (Cromley, Kerr, Meister, Patterson, & Woods, 2005; Leithwood

& Montgomery, 1982; Leithwood & Riehl, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2003). Based on this brief review of principal impact, it can be concluded that there is a direct relationship between effective principal leadership and student achievement.

Furthermore, effective leadership has been correlated with the satisfaction of teachers and their desire to remain in the teaching profession (Spinella, 2003; Sorapuru, 2005). “High teacher attrition rates have numerous negative consequences, including disrupting the continuity of educational programs, school planning, student learning, and forcing school districts to increase expenditures in recruiting and hiring new teachers” (Spinella, 2003, p. 1). The effective leader can support and retain quality teachers which will benefit the school through increased teacher capacity, more stable school culture, and increased school attainment.

Thus, do principals make a difference? While many researchers feel as though this question must be answered depending on the context in which the principal works, the general consensus is that one of the most important characteristics of an effective school is leadership (Educational Alliance at Brown University, 2003; Kelley & Williamson, 2006; SREB, 1998).

An extensive study conducted by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) and Southern Research Education Board (SREB) analyzed data from multiple years of research which indicated that effective leadership can be defined conceptually (Louisiana Department of Education, 2006). The studies conducted clearly specify a direct correlation between specific principal factors and student achievement. They found that there is a “real art” to being an effective leader, and it does not occur by happenstance. McREL identified 21 key leadership responsibilities that were found to positively impact student achievement. The effective principal:

1.Focuses on culture	3.Focuses on discipline
3.Focuses on discipline	4. Provides resources
5. Designs and implements curriculum, instruction, and assessments	6. has clear focus
7. Has extensive knowledge about curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	8. Has quality interactions with students and teachers
9. Recognizes accomplishments	10. Establishes strong lines of communication
11. Is advocate for school	12. Solicits input from teachers
13. Celebrates school accomplishments	14. Demonstrates awareness of personal aspects of teacher and staff
15. Actively challenges the status quo	16. Inspires others to lead
17. Communicates strong beliefs	18. Monitors the effectiveness of the school
19. Has great ability to adapt to various situations	20. Is aware of the undercurrents in the school
21. Ensures faculty and staff are intellectually stimulated	

Fig. 2 Critical success factors of school principals

These 21 Critical Success Factors may be what separates “effective and non-effective schools” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2001, p. 3). A small but growing body of empirical evidence demonstrates that effective principals have a positive impact on student achievement, school climate, and teacher retention (Fuller, 2009). While there are many factors contributing to student achievement (teacher effectiveness and high parent involvement levels, for example), over 30 years of research highlights the importance of having quality principals in schools (Cromley, Kerr, Meister, Patterson, & Woods, 2005). Thus, schools focused on raising

student achievement need effective principals. This might occur by attracting stronger candidates, improving principal preparation, improving induction, or focusing efforts to remove poor quality principals and retain effective principals. The issue addressed here of how to identify and retain effective principals is not one that can be taken lightly, especially when viewing the impact of the principal's role on student and school success.

Rising Crisis: Principals Are Leaving

Although there is some variation in the literature on principal effects, the widely held consensus is that there is a critical need for leaders who impact school community growth. But who will lead? According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Educational Research Service (ERS), and the Wallace Foundation Policy Brief (Wallace Foundation, 2003), the number of principal vacancies in the United States is expected to increase to nearly 20% over the next ten years. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) projects that ~~public~~ schools will need about 35,000 administrators" within the next decade (Zeitoun & Newton, 2002). This has produced a loud wake-up call for many states to initiate urgent recruitment measures for leaders into the field of administration and to create a plan for retention of the effective leaders they currently have in place. Over the next decade, the baby-boomer generation of teachers and administrators who entered into the profession during the 1960's and 1970's will be approaching retirement (Zeitoun & Newton, 2002). NAESP (1998) reports that nearly 40% of ~~veteran~~" principals in the United States are close to retirement and are more than ~~anxious~~ to see their way out of the door" (Association of California Schools Association, 2001, p.1; Wallace Foundation, 2003).

To remediate the predicted principal shortage, the logical action by superintendents typically would be to fill the vacant positions with future principal aspirants. Regrettably, research indicates that there has been a waning administrative pool across America. Many teachers who currently have the administrative certifications required to enter into a principalship career are making a conscious decision not to do so, increasing the likelihood of a future crisis in principal openings (Anderson, 1991; NAESP 1998; Cromley, Kerr, Meister, Patterson & Woods, 2005; Militello & Behnke, 2006; Zeitoun & Newton, 2002). The National Association for Elementary School Principals suggests many factors that contribute to the lack of interest of qualified candidates. The top three discouraging factors cited by superintendents surveyed nationwide were (1) compensation insufficient compared to job responsibilities, (2) too much time required, and (3) job too stressful (NAESP, 2007). The common issue of supply and demand becomes critical for many states as these predictions for future principal shortages become a disappointing factor in filling vacant positions.

Even internationally, the scarcity of principals is creating huge concern. In New Zealand, a study of principal retention in rural schools revealed that principals average only 2.63 years per position (Fraser & Brock, 2006). In England, there is very disturbing evidence that the number of vacancies and appointments are becoming more difficult to fill. England reappoints the school head administrator every seven years. In 2005, of the 12% of schools advertising to fill the position, one-third of the schools were not able to make an appointment after the initial advertisement and had to post a re-advertisement. The Education Data Surveys (EDS) reported that re-advertisement of these positions has reached crisis levels (Davies, 2007, p. 27).

Across the United States, ~~a~~approximately half of the school districts reported a shortage in labor pool for kindergarten through the 12 grades principal positions they were trying to fill” (National Association for Elementary School Principals, 1998, p.2). Several states in America have begun to experience principal shortages that they can attribute the attrition to high rates of retirement. For instance, in Pennsylvania, legislators pushed for a study that focused on the shortage of principals across 501 districts in that state. The findings indicated that there was a principal shortage that mirrored the national statistics, with 279 positions left vacant in the 2001 - 2002 academic school year. The researchers also investigated the shortages by category (urban, suburban, rural, and area vocational technology schools). The results showed that rural schools had the highest percent of vacancies in six of ten administrator categories (Cromley, Kerr, Meister, Patterson, & Woods, 2005).

Connecticut experienced the same national trends as related to principal shortages. In 2001, Connecticut public school districts reported 223 vacancies for administrative positions. Yet, Connecticut State Department of Education (CDSE) reports indicate that more than 5,000 educators working as teachers or in another non-administrative capacity hold the appropriate certifications to be a principal (Zeitoun & Newton, 2002, p.11).

California also faces a dissipating pool of candidates for the principalship. A recent survey by the Association of California School Administrators found that 90% of districts reported shortages of high school principal candidates, and 73% reported shortages of elementary principal candidates. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing has more than 34,000 people on file with administrative credentials in California, which is more than enough to fill the 23,000 school administrative positions. However, many are seeking

administrative work as teacher mentors or curriculum directors in an attempt to avoid the overwhelming responsibilities of the principalship (Bell, 2001).

According to Massachusetts Department of Education data, 3,500 people in the state held school administrator licenses as of October 2003. However, a report prepared by the Division of Teacher and State Licensure of the Virginia Department of Education indicated that many of those who hold administrative licenses do not intend to become school principals or assistant principals (Demary & Palmiero, 2003). This finding was confirmed by feedback from participants at the Aspiring Leaders Conferences held across the state in 2002-2004, and a 2002 Massachusetts Department of Education Study of administrator preparation programs (Militello & Behnke, 2006).

A report published by the Texas High School Project Leadership Initiative documents the principal tenure and retention rates of newly hired principals in Texas public school from 1995 through 2008. The study used longitudinal data sets provided by the Texas Education Agency from multiple decades. Data included personal characteristics of each principal, accountability rating, geographic location of the school, and principal certification test score. A summary of the seven major findings include: principal retention rates for elementary grade levels are higher than for high school, all high school are experiencing greater turnover—just over 50% of newly hired principals stay for three years and less than 30% stay for five years”, during the initial year as principal, student achievement has a major impact on retention, high-poverty, rural areas experience lower retention rates, and certification levels of the principal, as well as personal characteristics resulted in little impact on principal retention. Overall, the average principal tenure for a newly hired principal was 4.51 years (Fuller & Young, 2009. p. 3).

The problem of principal shortages in low-performing schools further exacerbates the issue of principal retention. According to the latest report by NAESP (2009) on attrition, mobility, and retention, each time a principal was changed from the school, the achievement levels and graduation rates were impacted negatively. As recorded, the first year the founding principal transitioned to the immediate successor into the school, the effect size was -0.98 indicating a small, non-statistically significant negative relationship between principal turnover and its impact on student achievement and graduation rates. In comparison, after the school received a third principal, the effect size increased to -5.52 , representing a negative, statistically significant result. With high attrition and mobility rates of the administrative pool, coupled with the impact of turnover on school success, make it be critical to identify factors that could contribute to the retention of school principals.

Much of the literature on school reform outlined organizational stability as a key factor in creating strong schools (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2000; Plecki et al., 2005; Weinstein, 2009; Vanderhaar et al., 2006). A study of business management groups showed, “high levels of employee turnover are found to be both the cause and effect of problematic conditions, and low performance in organizations” (Ingersoll, 1999, p.7). In relationship in school environments, a study by Weinstein et al. (2009) indicated school atmospheric conditions took a downturn during each transition period, both prior to and after the principal leaves. It was identified as a very “sensitive time in determining the success of the school” (Weinstein et al., 2009, p. 7). It was concluded that the fluctuations in staff place the implementation of school improvement plans at risk. The role of setting the tone for the school environment, creating cultures of achievement, increasing staff morale, and ensuring a high quality school environment for learning and teaching

are important tasks for the school principal and each new leader must begin anew. Retaining the leaders we need is key to producing the stability needed for schools to make long-term gains.

Previous Efforts to Ensure Effective Principals Remain

Within the present decade, the issue of recruiting and retaining effective leaders has caused the federal and state legislatures to focus their attention on school administration. During 2001, 39 bills relating to school leadership were proposed in state legislative sessions; ten of these became law by 2001 (Groff, 2001). Most of them had to do with professional improvement of school leaders. As a part of the NAESP lobbying efforts to attract and retain quality leadership for our nation's schools, the *School Leadership Program* of the 2002 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind)* distributed grants totaling \$10 million during the fiscal year 2002 to help address the shortage" (NAESP, 2007, p. 2).

The most common methods used by local school boards to attract and retain school leaders are increased financial compensation, job mentoring and support, and leadership training" (Hinton & Kastner, 2000, p.1). Title II, Part A, of NCLB emphasizes the need to prepare, train, and recruit highly qualified teachers and principals" so that student achievement will improve. Under Section 9101 of NCLB, the Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) have the opportunity to develop alternative routes to certification to increase the number of highly qualified principals and assistant principals (LDE, 2007). The federal government has placed millions of dollars into enhancing the leadership quality of our principals. This funding, along with that of several non-profit and privately funded groups has provided principals with several mentoring and induction programs, salary increases, university partnerships, and additional school administrative personnel to share tasks in an effort to retain quality leaders.

Mentoring and support programs. One such organization is New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS). NLNS is a national non-profit organization with a mission of “promoting high academic achievement for every child by attracting, preparing, and supporting the next generation of outstanding leaders for our nation’s urban public schools” (New Leaders for New Schools, 2010, p. 1). On February 5, 2007, they partnered with New Orleans to recruit and develop 40 outstanding school leaders over a three-year period. The program includes ten weeks of training, a one-year paid internship, weekly coaching from an experienced principal, administrative certification, and two years of ongoing support once on the job as a school leader.

The Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education policy requires all newly appointed principals and assistant principals to complete a two-year induction program. The Louisiana Principal Induction Program (LPI) was designed to build the capacity of new building level administrators. The program is aligned with current state mandates on leadership development and the Standards for School Principals in Louisiana (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007). The expected outcomes of the program are for leaders to be proficient and skilled in school improvement processes, school accountability and enhanced student achievement.

The School Leadership Center of Greater New Orleans (SLC), funded by the largest private grant-making organization in Louisiana, Baptist Community Ministries, was consummated in November of 1998. SLC is a professional development and support organization designed for the professional growth of principals and collegial networking. The SLC of Greater New Orleans places a huge emphasis on giving principals and other school leaders the skills, resources, and tools that are needed to improve teaching and learning in their

schools. Through its Fellows Program, the SLC works with 56 principals in a five-parish area to provide training in the areas of student assessment, changing school culture, and creating learning communities. Fellows must participate in fall, spring, and summer institutes for two full years of intensive training. Additionally, SLC has a research and professional development services department that fellows in all five parishes can benefit from for specific needs of their schools. The promising news is that there are clear indications that student achievement is improving significantly more in SLC Fellows' schools than in other comparable schools across the state. SLC schools showed a 54% greater academic growth than non SLC schools within the five civil parishes that SLC serves" (School Leadership Center, 2004, p. 1).

Effective organizational support structures are necessary in creating a principalship that can be sustained over time. With a restructuring of personnel to assist with instructional or managerial duties, the principal's role could become one that is more manageable. For example, The System for Teacher and Student Advancement Program (TAP), created by Lowell Milken and the Milken Family Foundation, focuses on building teacher capacity and enabling many master and mentor teachers to take on several job responsibilities had been on the principals' plate through a shared instructional leadership model. Master and mentor teachers provide weekly job-embedded professional development for the improvement of instructional strategies, observation and evaluations of teacher practices, coaching and modeling of effective methods, and data tracking for the entire student population (TAP, 2009). Through the program, the role of the principal transforms to monitoring and management, rather than being the only member in charge of the full implementation of instructional leadership responsibilities. Also, many TAP schools have assistant principals or administrative assistants who are responsible for management of the school building and discipline. It is this type of restructuring of human

capital that can assist in the retention of principals due to the reduction in overwhelming job responsibilities, often noted by principals in the past as “too much for one person to handle” (NAESP, 1998, p. 1).

Increased salaries. Competitive salaries for principals have been noted as a factor influencing principal retention, according to several survey studies across states (NAESP, 1998; Hinton & Kastner, 2000). Data from *the National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools* were collected from the Educational Research Services (ERS) since 1973. The ratio of average salaries earned for principals to teachers remained fairly close over time. For example, the ratio of principal average salaries and teachers salaries was 166.0 in 2004 -2005. In the 2008-2009 academic school year, it was 166.5. “The closeness of their patterns show that neither group has gained or lost substantially” (Cooke & Licciardi, 2008, p. 2). When comparing the minimum teacher salary to the maximum principal salary, the highest paid principal makes 66% more than the lowest paid classroom teachers. However, when comparing the highest paid principal to the maximum scale for the teacher, the pay disparity is reduced to 40% (Cooke & Licciardi, 2008). For instance, in Pittsburgh, the veteran teacher takes home \$60,000 per year, not including any supplemental payments. In New Orleans, teachers can be hired to teach and mentor other classroom teachers within a school. These lead teachers, along with veteran teachers, can earn \$60,000 salaries for a 6- to 7-hour work day. Supplemental stipends for mentoring and high ratings on evaluations can garner an estimated additional \$5,000 per year. Thus, despite salary increases for principals over the last decade, the degree of difference between the teacher salaries and principal salaries pale by comparison when factoring in the increased workload and number of hours spent on the job. In summary, compensating quality principals at national levels is one way to help improve retention rates of principals as principals

and future candidates have indicated this as a major factor that helps them to decide if they should stay as a principal or enter the profession (NAESP, 1998). There is very little evidence to support the impact of efforts by mentoring programs and increased salaries on retaining school leaders. Additionally, more is being required of principals than in the past. Principal shortages persist.

Context for Study: Louisiana's Lowest-Performing Schools

The 1,113 Louisiana's schools are different in many ways from schools across the country. For example, they operate in a state devastated by natural disasters, a, have one of the highest rates of poverty in the nation with 31% of children living in poverty, and are in a state that allows school takeover under numerous and varied governance configurations, including five types of charter schools, magnet schools, and alternative schools. Pre-Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana schools represented one the lowest-performing public educational systems in America. . In 1999, at the start of the accountability system in Louisiana, 40% of the state's schools earned an SPS score below a 65 (LDOE, 2011). In 2003, the Louisiana Legislature responded by passing the *Recovery Schools District Act* that allowed any school that did not make adequate yearly progress for four consecutive years to be taken over by the state and placed under the control of the state Recovery School District (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2010). In 2010, there were a total of 43 schools earning a performance score of below 60, then the minimum score required to avoid the Academically Unacceptable Schools label (<http://www.louisianaschools.net>, 2010). There were an additional 198 schools within the range of 65-75. Without improvement in scores, schools below 65 will be considered Academically Unacceptable by spring of 2011-2012 school year and placed on Academic Watch are between

65 and 74.9. Under newly proposed legislation by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, these schools would be labeled with a letter grade of “D” and “F” and considered performing below standards. Additionally, out of 1,113 schools in Louisiana, only 443 schools had reached the 120 School Performance Score or above goal set by BESE for the year 2014. The state of Louisiana ranked 21st in the country on the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) (LDOE, 2011). While progress has been made from 2009 where the state ranked 35th in the country, it received a letter grade of F for K-12 achievement. State legislators are not satisfied with the educational status and continues to draft, revise and implement new accountability systems in an effort for improved achievement levels (school choice, takeover, supplemental education services) (LDOE, 2011).

Literature Review Summary

The preceding was a review of literature exploring principals’ intent to stay in low-performing schools, including a decade of empirical studies of principal retention, principal shortage, and low-performing schools. Because there are only a few studies on principals’ intent to stay in the profession in the current accountability era, it is conclusive, particularly in low-performing schools, that this topic merits further study. The prediction of significant vacancies has become a reality in several states and the accountability pressures are only increasing for principals to turn around schools to perform to standard. Furthermore, there is still a gap in the literature with unanswered reasons as to what impacts a principal’s decision to stay or leave the profession. The most common factors in the literature found to influence a principals’ decision to stay or leave the profession are amount of time spent at work, inadequate compensation, and complex job responsibilities. Only recently have any studies researched factors such as

performance levels of the school or school size, finding these factors significant (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010; Branch, Hanusschek & Rivkin, 2009; Gates et. al, 2005; Horng, Kalogrides & Loab, 2010; Weinstein et al., 2009;). Although the aforementioned studies address factors influencing retention in several states in America, there are no studies to date from Louisiana on principals' intent to stay or leave low-performing schools.

Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making (SLTCDM) posits that four influencers (personal characteristics, learning experiences, environmental conditions, task skills) interact to guide an individual through the career decision-making process. This study intends to explore the four influencers as potential factors influencing principals' intent to stay in Louisiana's low-performing schools.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter contains a summary of the correlational methodology that will be used, the research questions and hypotheses, research design, data collection procedures, and the approach to be used to analyze and interpret the data for this study. The study was designed to examine the impact of several independent variables (i.e., personal characteristics, environment, learning experiences, and task skills) on the dependent variable, principal intent to stay in a low-performing school. A review of the literature determined that research in this area is limited as it relates to factors influencing principals' intent to stay in low-performing schools threatened with state takeover.

Research Questions

The general research questions for this study are as follows:

1. To what extent do the four factors of Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making (personal characteristics, environment, formal learning experiences and task skills) combine to predict principals' intent to stay in the role of principal in a low-performing school in Louisiana?
2. What is the relative contribution of each of these factors in predicting principals' intent to stay ?

Research Design

A correlational research design was utilized to examine variables (personal characteristics, environment, formal learning experiences, and task skills) that influence the principals' intent to stay in the role of principal in a low-performing school. A survey research design is used in quantitative research to describe attitudes, opinions, beliefs, characteristics, and behaviors of a given population of people. In addition, survey research is used to describe trends and not provide explanations (Creswell, 2002). Due to the researcher's interest in examining and describing which predictor variables are most influential in predicting principals' intent to stay in their position, a correlational design was an appropriate method for this study. The purpose of this study was to describe which predictor variables are most influential in predicting principals' intent to stay in their role of principal in low-performing schools. Therefore, using a design that allows for a deeper understanding of attitudes, opinions, beliefs, characteristics, and behaviors of a given population of people through description of trends, aligns with the purpose of this study.

Participants' Background

The available population for this study was all 220 administrators in the state of Louisiana who had served in the role of principal or assistant principal in a low-performing school for a minimum of one academic school year. For this study, low-performing schools include schools in an *Academically Unacceptable* (0-60) or *Academic Watch* (60.1-74.9) status. In the state of Louisiana, each local education agency consists of one of three governing structures: Public School District, Independent Charter School, or the Louisiana Recovery School District. The principals selected for this study were employed within one of these categories. The participants varied in gender, age, ethnicity, and level of experience as an

administrator. These demographic variables were considered in the analyses in Chapter 4. The participants included 125 principals who served in low-performing schools as indicated by the Academic Watch or Academically Unacceptable accountability performance label. The majority of the participants in the study were African American females with ages ranging from 33 to 55. The participants on average also indicated 10 years or less overall experience as principal in any school (73%) and 5 years or less leading in a low-performing school (65%). The highest degree level of most principals was Masters +30 and nearly all held a certification in educational leadership. Most (93%) of the principals attended a traditional college or university program at a college or university campus. Less than 7% gained their educational leadership licensure through an online course or district-sponsored leadership program. The top educational job positions previously held by principals were elementary teacher, middle school teacher, and principal or assistant principal. A low percentage of the principals indicated they served as a department head at any point in their career.

The school environments were medium to large in size, with student population numbers ranging from 400 to 599 (medium) to 600-999 (large). The socioeconomic status of the schools indicated that principals were leading in high-poverty areas. The majority of the principals were working in a public elementary/middle school that had been labeled by the state's education department as Academic Watch. Principals who indicated being employed by charter schools were primarily in Type 5 charters which are schools taken over by the Recovery School District and run by independent groups.

All administrators in low-performing schools for the academic year 2010-2011 within the state of Louisiana were asked to complete the survey. Often it is difficult to include all

participants of the population in a study when it is too large (Creswell, 2002). However, this group of 220 participants was small enough that it could reasonably be managed by the researcher, including follow-up phone calls and emails to increase the response rate. A minimum response rate of 75% was targeted, but 57% was received. Although the responses of the participants were completely anonymous, this targeted group of administrators is under such close scrutiny, some may have felt threatened and not completed the surveys. Also, time constraints for principals could also explain the lower response rate. Finally, the mobility of principals created difficulty in locating up-to-date email addresses.

Data Collection

Before conducting this study, ethical considerations were addressed. It was the researcher's responsibility to guarantee minimal risk of injuries or harm to the participants (Creswell, 2002). Thus, the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board (2010, p.3) outlined research guidelines that were followed. The guidelines are based on three ethical principles: respect for persons (their consent, their right to privacy, and anonymity); beneficence (weighing the benefits of research versus the risks to individuals); and justice (equity for participation in the study)".

Upon approval from the Dissertation Committee and the Institutional Review Board, the data were collected using an electronic survey. The goal of descriptive research is to test the formulated hypotheses to describe and explain relationships between factors and the topic of interest (Creswell, 2003; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). The literature on the topic, research questions to be answered, and population to be studied guided this researcher in choosing the design for data collection. The explanatory design allowed the researcher to collect data that

described the appropriateness/applicability of the four factors of Krumboltz's social learning and career decision making theory (personal characteristics, environment, formal learning experiences and task skills) the intentions of principals to remain in low-performing schools.

The data were collected through the use of online questionnaires. The administrator of each school was asked to participate in the study via an email and advised through an attached consent letter that all responses were voluntary and anonymous (see Appendix A). Participants were not asked to submit their names or school site on the survey instrument. Participants gave implied consent by completing the survey. Two weeks after distribution, a thank you letter was sent via email to all participants, with a follow-up reminder to complete the survey if they had not done so. Two more subsequent emails were sent for follow-up to encourage non-respondents to participate. An incentive raffle prize was offered at that time.

The instrument selected for this study, *Principal Intent to Stay Survey*, was used in a previous study to examine the roots of principal shortages in Massachusetts (Militello & Behnke, 2006). In the study by Militello and Behnke, the 19-item Likert-type survey instrument was designed to elicit information on a principal's work history, reasons for becoming a principal, perceptions of available support mechanisms, types of professional development that are most useful, and whether they expect to leave the principalship in the next five years. The 19 Likert-type questions included in the survey addressed previous positions held before assuming the principalship, age upon assuming the principalship, and years of teaching experience. Demographic questions also were incorporated by Militello and Behnke for gender, age, race, and district type. The survey instrument was based upon the extant literature and reviewed by former principals during two group interviews for face, content, and construct validity, and to

determine the amount of time it would take principals to complete. For the purpose of this research study, the researcher contacted the Massachusetts survey developer for permission to use the survey instrument and received a positive response from the author, granting permission to utilize and modify the instrument (see Appendix D).

The revisions for the *Principal Intent to Stay Survey* that was used for this study included questions to measure the independent variables based on the four factors of Krumboltz's (1990) theory: personal and professional characteristics, principal's environment, learning experiences, task skills. The dependent variable was modified to assess intent to stay in the role of principal in low-performing schools rather than the principalship in general. The revised questions were supported in the literature as factors that are related to principal retention. The modified *Principal Intent to Stay Survey* has five sections that include a total of 29 multiple choice and open-ended response questions. Questions that were added to the original survey from the study on principal retention in Massachusetts were (1) item 11 designed based upon the ISSLC standards that were used to measure the principals' perceptions of their task skill ability on the job, (2) items 10, 12, and 13 designed to elicit information on the size of the school, economic level of the students served, and salary of the principal, (3) item 14 designed to examine the types of support principals feel they need, and (4) item 15 designed to measure the principals' perceptions of their task skill/abilities to accomplish the job. The 29-item survey is easy-to read, has a completion time of about 15 minutes, and requires the principal to do minimal writing. The *Principals' Intent to Stay Survey* was used in a pilot study during the spring of 2011 to ensure validity and reliability.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher was interested in predicting the principals' intent to stay in the role of principal from a set of predictor variables (personal characteristics, environment, learning experiences, and task skills). When a research question addresses prediction of an outcome based on a set of at least two or more quantitatively measured predictor variables, the multiple regression testing procedure can be used (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005).

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 19.0) was used to enter data and obtain results. First, descriptive statistics were used to describe and summarize the data so that the researcher could assess general trends and overall distribution of the data. This set of procedures produced frequency distributions for the specified variables to include the means and standard deviations for interval data, and frequencies for nominal data (Cronk, 1999).

The results were analyzed and interpreted using the coefficient of determination, R square. R^2 was reported to explain the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that could be explained by the independent variables (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). The F test, p values, unstandardized regression coefficient (B), and standardized regression coefficient (beta or β) also are reported.

Limitations and Delimitations

The results of this study may only be generalized to the population of Louisiana's principals leading its low-performing schools. The results may not be generalized to other school districts in contexts not resembling these schools in Louisiana. Also, the response rate may have

affected the validity of the findings. Because the responses were anonymous, it cannot be determined if non-respondents were in any meaningful way different than respondents.

A delimitation of this study was the use of quantitative methods only. Mixed methods would have allowed the researcher to go further in-depth to understand the impact of stress on retention, district support needed as perceived by the participants, and school environment characteristics that create challenges in low-performing schools. Through the use of further qualitative methods, more insight could have been provided as it relates to the several factors surrounding principals' intent to stay. A mixed methods approach was not selected for this study because of the delicate nature of the topic regarding the principals' intent to stay or leave. It was very important within the context of this study that with certainty the participants remained anonymous. However, it would be recommended that future researchers use qualitative methods to explore district support, on-the-job learning, and school performance scores without examining their intent to stay or leave.

Chapter Four

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings related to the investigation of factors related to principals' intent to stay in the profession of principalship in low-performing schools in Louisiana. The results are presented in four sections: 1) data collection and response rate, 2) descriptive statistics, 3) inferential statistics and, 4) conclusion.

Data Collection and Response Rate

Participants for the study were selected from a spring 2010 Academically Unacceptable Schools and Academic Watch List provided by the LDOE. For the purposes of this study, low-performing schools were defined as schools that performed below the required Louisiana accountability standards and labeled as Academically Unacceptable (AUS), School Performance Score of 0-60 or Academic Watch with a School Performance Score of 61-75. Only principals who were employed in low-performing schools for a minimum of one academic year were asked to participate in the study. A total of 220 principals were sent an email requesting their participation based on these criteria. The email addresses were obtained from a 2009 LDOE School Principal Directory that included school information for about 1,369 principals. The researcher used the 2010-2011 AUS and Academic Watch List to sort only the 220 email addresses for principals serving in all low-performing schools in Louisiana from the School Principal Directory. To screen participants as leaders in low-performing schools, the first item on the survey asked the participant if they served in a low-performing school (i.e., Academically Unacceptable or Academic Watch) for at least one academic year.

The first survey request was first sent in January 2012 to the participants. The email consisted of a brief description of the survey and the benefits of participating, along with a link to the survey itself. Of the 220 principals emailed, 48 completed surveys were received. Two weeks after the first electronic mailing of the survey, a second email was sent to the participants. They were told that they would be included in with a raffle drawing for a gift card if the survey was completed by February 17th. This second request for participation brought the total to 88 surveys completed. After reviewing the number of email addresses that were returned as incorrect, the researcher contacted the LDOE for a more current school directory. Fortunately, the LDOE had just published the *2012 School Principal Directory* with corrected information on current school principals. Again, the 2010-2011 LDOE published AUS and Academic Watch lists were used to sort and locate only the addresses for low-performing schools from the *2012 School Principal Directory*. In the last week of February, the emails were sent to the most up-to-date addresses. After this third request, 125 completed surveys were received. Overall, there were a total number of 220 emails sent with the request to complete the survey. There were 135 principals who started the survey and 125 who completed the survey. This represents a little over 50% response rate (see Table 1).

The intended response rate for this study was 75%. However, after review of the 2012 LDOE School Principal Directory in comparison to the 2010 LDOE School Principal Directory, several principals did not remain in the same low-performing school or in the profession of principalship at all. To partially explain the 57 response rate, several of the principals that either did not participate by completing the survey or clicked the link to begin the survey and did not fully complete it, may have not have done so because they did not meet the criteria of being employed in a low-performing school for a minimum of one academic year. A question was

included to separate these principals from participation in the study. This would indicate that the response rate could have been higher if these participants could not be included in the total of 220 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Response Rate

Total Emailed	Surveys Started	Incomplete	Complete	Usable
n(%)	n(%)	n(%)	n(%)	n(%)
220 (100.00)	135 (61.36)	10(4.55)	125(56.81)	125(56.81)

Descriptive Statistics

Personal and Professional Characteristics

According to Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making (1990), there are four influencers that predict the career decisions of an individual. Krumboltz's theory guided the selection of the independent variables used for this study which included: (1) personal and professional characteristics of the principal, (2) school environment in which the principal works, (3) formal learning experiences, and (4) the task skills and ability of the principal. The descriptive statistics are provided for each of these four categories below.

In this study, personal and professional characteristics were measured by gender, age, ethnicity, years of service, years of service in low -performing schools, level of degree, and certification level. Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics from the responses to these items. The majority of principals who responded were in the age range of 35-44 (78%). Sixty-two percent (62%) were female and thirty-eight (38%) male. As for ethnicity, sixty-two (62%) of the

school principals were of African American descent, thirty-six percent (36%) Caucasian, 0% Hispanic or Asian, and 2% other. Due to the low variation in the responses to question 5, race was dichotomized as 0=non-white and 1=white.

Professional characteristics were measured by years of experience, degree levels, certification levels, and previous job positions held. Forty-one percent (41%) of principals surveyed served in the role of principal five years or less in any school (i.e., low or high performing). About two-thirds 66% served in a low-performing school five years or less. Overall, a large number of low-performing schools in Louisiana have school leaders' with less than 10 years experience (72%). Nearly all respondents (92%) of the population surveyed held a master's degree or higher and 8% held the doctorate. The majority of the principals held certification in education leadership (93%). The top three certification areas held by principals were (1) educational leadership (93%), (2) supervision and instruction (32%), and (3) curriculum and instruction (28%). The top three job positions held by principals were (1) principal/asst. principal, (2) middle school teacher, and (3) elementary school teacher (see Table 2).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Personal and Professional Characteristics

Characteristics	Item#	Responses	Frequency	%
Gender	4	Male	35	38.5
		Female	72	61.5
Age	3	65 years or more	1	00.9
		64-55 years	26	22.4
		55-45	34	29.3

Characteristics	Item#	Responses	Frequency	%
Age	3	44-35	44	37.9
		35 or less	11	9.50
Yrs. of service	7	1 year or less	5	4.30
		2-5 years	42	36.5
		6-10 years	36	31.3
		11-15 years	20	17.4
		16 or more years	12	10.4
Yrs. in low-performing	8	1 year or less	10	8.70
		2-5 years	65	56.5
		6-10 years	30	26.1
		11-15 years	9	7.80
		16 or more	1	00.9
Highest degree	9	Doctoral	9	7.80
		Masters +30	55	47.8
		Masters	51	44.3
Certification area	10	Educational Leadership	106	78.5
		Curriculum & Instruction	32	23.7
		Superintendent	5	3.7
		Supervision & Evaluation	36	26.7
		Other	17	12.6
Educ. positions held	11	Elementary Teacher (K-5)	55	40.7
		Middle School Teacher (6-8)	59	43.7
		High School Teacher (9-12)	49	36.3
		School Department Head	31	23.0
		Asst. Principal or Principal	105	77.8
		Administrator at District	25	18.5
		Other	17	12.6

Characteristics of the School Environment

The characteristics of the school environment are depicted in Table 3. School size and socioeconomic status of students has been referred to in the literature as two factors directly be correlated with teacher and principal retention rates (Horng, Kalogrides, and Loab, 2010). As

shown in Table 3, a low percentage of principals served in schools with 200 or less students (10%) or more than 1,000 students (2%). The typical student population for schools reported by principals was 400-599 (33%) or 600-999 (32%), indicating larger school sizes exists for many of the low-performing school sites. The poverty level of students was measured by the percentage of students eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch within the school. Highest poverty level (90%-100%) was coded as 1 and the lowest poverty level as 6. An overwhelming 88% of the principals were leaders of schools with 80% or more students living in poverty. The most frequently reported principals' salary range was 81,000-100,000 (46%).

For the most part, respondents indicated they were principals of a public school system (51%). About one-fourth (25%) were in an independent charter school and 22% worked under the Recovery School District. The school leaders working in a charter school were asked to specify the charter type (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). Nearly all worked in type 5 charter schools (76%). As well, a good number of principals were employed in an elementary or middle school (27%). The majority of schools had an SPS range of 61-75 (53%).

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for School Environment

Characteristics	Item #	Codes	Frequency	%
Student population	12	Less than 200	11	9.6
		200 to 399	27	23.5
		400 to 599	38	33.0
		600 to 999	37	32.2
		1000 or more	2	1.7
Grade levels	13	Elementary	64	47.4
		Middle	37	27.4
		High	34	25.2
		Other	2	1.5

Characteristics	Item #	Codes	Frequency	%
School district	14	Recovery Schools	25	21.9
		Independent Charter	29	25.4
		Public Schools	60	52.6
Charter type	15	Type 1	1	2.4
		Type 2	4	9.8
		Type 3	2	4.9
		Type 4	3	7.3
		Type 5	31	75.6
SPS range	16	0-15 SPS	3	2.6
		16-30 SPS	4	3.5
		31-45 SPS	9	7.9
		46-60 SPS	23	20.2
		61-75 SPS	60	52.6
		75 or higher	15	13.2
Lunch status	17	90%-100%	84	73.0
		80%-89%	17	14.8
		70%-79%	5	4.3
		60%-69%	7	6.1
		50%-59%	2	1.7
		40% or below	0	0.0
Salary range	18	50,000 or below	3	2.7
		51,000-65,000	14	12.4
		66,000-80,000	41	36.3
		81,000-100,000	52	46.0
		101,000 or above	3	2.7

District Support

To measure the level of effective district support provided to principals in the school, principals were asked, ~~In~~ your opinion, how effectively does your district support you in each of the following tasks: curriculum and instruction, data-driven decision making, testing and

accountability, parental and community involvement, school improvement planning, minimizing paperwork, discipline and behavior, and securing necessary resources.” The three areas considered by principals as having the highest level of support were (1) testing and accountability, (2) data-driven decision making, and (3) curriculum and instruction. The lowest supported areas by the district as perceived by principals were minimizing paperwork, discipline and behavior, and parent and community involvement. Table 4 presents a summary of data for district support. The eight items used to measure district support were placed into a single scale that can be assessed as one predictor variable in the regression equation. A Cronbach alpha of .917 justifies the decision. The mean score for this scale is 3.48 out of 5 and a standard deviation of 1.21.

Table 4***Descriptive Statistics for District Support***

Item	Item #	Mean	Standard Deviation
	21		
Curriculum & Instruction		3.80	1.14
Data-driven Decision Making		3.92	1.10
Testing/Accountability		4.05	1.10
Parental/Community Involvement		3.11	1.26
School Improvement Planning		3.70	1.19
Minimizing Paperwork		2.85	1.30
Discipline/Behavior		3.80	1.34
Securing Necessary Resources		3.51	1.26
Total Scale		3.48	1.21

Note. $n=135$.

Key. 1=Ineffective, 2=Somewhat Ineffective, 3=Neutral/Not Sure, 4=Somewhat Effective, 5=Very Effective

Formal Learning Experiences

Tables 5 and 6 display the descriptive statistics for formal learning experiences. To measure the principals' formal learning experiences, the participants were asked two questions, (1) ~~In~~ In your opinion, how effective were your on-the job trainings provided by your current employer/school board, in improving your professional learning experiences in the following

areas?” (see Table 5), and (2) “What type of licensure program did you complete? (i.e., alternate certification program, online certification program, and traditional university)” (see Table 6).

On average, principals viewed the learning experiences provided by their current employer/school board between “neutral/not sure” and “somewhat effective.” The top three most effective trainings as perceived by principals included (a) data driven decision making, (b) testing and accountability, and (c) curriculum and instruction. Parental and community support and discipline/behavior received the two lowest scores (see Table 5). The ten items assessing formal learning experiences were considered a single scale for regression purposes. A Cronbach alpha of .924 justifies this decision. An average of all item responses yielded a scale score for formal learning experiences with a mean of 3.62 and standard deviation of .940.

Table 5***Descriptive Statistics for Formal Learning Experiences***

Item	Item #	Mean	Standard Deviation
	19		
Creating A Vision		3.39	1.28
Creating a Safe/Orderly Environment		3.57	1.29
Building Capacity in Faculty		3.49	1.14
Curriculum & Instruction		3.80	1.17
Data-driven decision making		4.12	0.96
Testing/Accountability		4.06	1.15
Parent/Community Support		3.19	1.30
School Improvement Planning		3.69	1.26
Discipline/Behavior		3.36	1.25
Securing Necessary Resources		3.52	1.24
Total Scale		3.62	0.94

Note. n=220.

Key. 1=Ineffective, 2=Somewhat Ineffective, 3=Neutral/Not Sure, 4=Somewhat Effective, 5=Very Effective

Most principals attended a college/university program on a college campus (93%) as opposed to an online program (2%) or district-sponsored leadership program (1%). As shown in

Table 6, there was little to no variation in the respondents' answers to question 22; therefore, this item was not used in the prediction analyses.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Formal Learning Experiences

Characteristics	Item #	Codes	Frequency	%
Licensure program	22	College/University Program Via College University Campus Coursework	100	93.5
		College/University Program Via Online Coursework	2	1.90
		District Sponsored Leadership Program	1	00.9
		Other	4	3.70

Leadership Task Skills and Abilities

To assess principals' perceived level of ability to complete leadership tasks, the participants were asked, "How effective do you believe you are at completing the following leadership tasks?" The ratings for the scale included ineffective, somewhat effective, neutral/not sure, somewhat effective, and very effective. The results, summarized in Table 7, show that most principals felt that they are most effective at creating a safe and orderly environment, using data for school improvement, and creating a vision. Principals rated themselves lowest on increasing parent and community involvement, securing necessary resources, and increasing

student achievement. The eight items used to assess task skills and abilities were merged and used as one predictor variable. A Cronbach alpha of .891 for these eight items justifies combining the items as one scale. Overall, the total mean score for this scale was 4.19 and a standard deviation of .614, which suggests that principals perceive their leadership abilities as somewhat effective.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Task Skills/Ability

Item	Item #	Mean	Standard Deviation
Creating A Vision	20	4.37	0.76
Creating a Safe/Orderly Environment		4.46	0.72
Increasing Student Achievement		4.08	0.83
Increasing Parent /Community Involvement		3.70	1.03
Building Capacity in Faculty		4.21	0.84
Securing Necessary Resources		4.01	0.90
Financial Management		4.20	0.87
Using Data for School Improvement		4.45	0.61
Total Scale		4.19	0.61

Note. n=220.

Key. 1=Ineffective, 2=Somewhat Ineffective, 3=Neutral/Not Sure, 4=Somewhat Effective, 5=Very Effective

Principals' Intent to Stay

The dependent variable in the study was principals' intent to stay in the profession of principalship in low-performing schools. Four questions were asked of participants to explore intent to stay: (a) —How often do you consider changing your role to take a job outside of the role of k-12 principal?”, (b) —If you had a choice, how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal?”, (c) —If you had a choice, how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal in your current school?”, and (d) —If you plan to leave the principalship within the next five years, please check the first, second, and third most important factors influencing your decision?”

Table 8 presents the data for principals' intent to stay.

The majority of principals reported intending to leave the profession of principalship within the next five years (66%), suggesting dissatisfaction with leading low-performing schools for this population of principals surveyed. Additionally, 54% of principals working in low-performing schools indicated a desire to leave their current school in three years or less. Finally, table 8 shows that 81% of the principals consider leaving on an average from *daily* to *occasionally*. A study conducted by Fuller and Young (2009) of principals that left the profession resulted in similar findings with principals not remaining in the profession of principalship more than 3 to 5 years. In low-performing schools, principals remained even fewer years (2.5 years).

The top three factors principals cited as reasons they would leave the principalship are (1) stress of the position (40.0%), (2) lack of district support (25.2%), and (3) time demands of the positions (23.7%) (see Table 8).

Table 8***Descriptive Statistics for Principals' Intent to Stay***

Characteristics	Item #	Responses	Frequency	%
Frequency of consideration to leave principalship role	23	Daily	20	18.5
		Weekly	18	16.7
		Occasionally	49	45.4
		Yearly	4	3.70
		Never	17	15.7
Length of time planning to stay in role	24	2 years or less	24	22.6
		3 years	16	15.1
		4 years	6	5.70
		5 years	23	21.7
		6 years or more	37	34.9
Length of time planning to stay in role in current school	25	6 or more years	28	25.9
		5 years	17	15.7
		4 years	9	8.30
		3 years or less	54	50.0
1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd most important factors influencing decision	26	Retirement	25	18.5
		Lack of district support	34	25.2
		Lack of autonomy	26	19.3
		Salary	18	13.3
		Time demands	32	23.7
		Stress of position	54	40.0
		Time restraints	29	21.5
		Uncooperative parents	7	5.20
		Community politics	16	11.9
		Pressure of testing	42	31.1
		Fear of school takeover	14	10.4
		other	8	8.00

Inferential Statistics

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of the four influencers associated with Krumboltz's (1990) social learning theory of career decision making and principals' intent to stay. The two research questions addressed were, "To what extent do the factors of Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making (personal characteristics, school environment, task skills, and learning experiences) combine to predict principals' intent to stay in the role of principal in low-performing schools, and what is the relative contribution of each of these factors in predicting principals' intent to remain?"

To answer the aforementioned research questions, multiple regression analyses were used. Regression models were formulated using the four influencers (personal and professional characteristics, formal learning experiences, school environment, and task skills) as independent variables to predict principals' intent to stay. There were three survey items used to measure the dependent variable, principals' intent to stay, (1) How often do you seriously consider changing your role to take a job outside of the role of K-12 principal, (2) If you had a choice, how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal, and (3) If you had a choice, how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal in your current school? A correlation matrix was used to identify relationships between variables. Multiple linear regressions were conducted on variables that were related linearly.

Correlations between Key Variables

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for the relationships between the independent and dependent variables used in the study. School performance score, district support, and on-the job learning as independent variables had moderate relationships with the

dependent variable, principals' intent to stay. All correlations relating these variables were between .3 and .7 (see Table 9). Also, the independent variable, district support, was strongly correlated with the independent variables, task skills and on-the-job learning. As well, a moderate correlation was found indicating a linear relationship between independent variables, task skills and on-the-job learning. School performance score and school size also had a moderate relationship, with larger schools having lower school performance scores. Moderate to high inter-correlations were determined at a significant level for age, race, gender, poverty level, and years of experience. The correlation matrix showing the strength of the linear relationship amongst key variables for this study is presented (See appendix E). . The independent variables found to have a linear relationship were used in the regression model. However, items that showed little to no variation in responses were not used as a part of the regression equation (i.e., certification levels, degree level, previous positions held, grade levels, district type, and licensure program).

Test of the Research Hypotheses

The two research hypotheses for this study were: (1) the four factors associated with Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making (personal characteristics, school environment, task skills, and learning experiences) would combine to predict principals' intent to stay in the role of principal in a low-performing school in Louisiana, and (2) each of the four factors would contribute independently in predicting principals' intent to stay. Three regressions were performed to determine if the hypotheses could be supported.

The first regression equation entered included four dependent variables (1) personal and professional characteristics as measured by gender, race, years of experience in any school and

years of experience in a low performing school, (2) school environment as measured by grade levels, socioeconomic status, population of school, salary, and district support (3) on-the-job learning as measured as a scale with ratings of effectiveness from 1-5 on trainings provided by their employer/school board, (4) task skills as measured one scale with ratings from 1-5 for the perceived task skills/abilities of principals, predict the dependent variable, principals' intent to stay, as measured by "How often do you seriously consider changing your role to take a job outside of the role of K-12 principal?" The results of the overall model yielded significant findings, ($F=3.04$, $p < .005$) (see Table 9). The R for the model was .56 and the R^2 was .32. The standardized betas are reported below (see Table 10). Standardized beta coefficients were found to be significant for school performance score and on-the-job learning experiences in predicting principals' intent to stay ($p < .001$). There were two major findings for this study. The factors, on-the-job learning experiences and school performance scores for the school, does predict at a significant level principals' intent to stay in a low-performing school in Louisiana. This will be discussed further in chapter 5.

Table 9***Model 1: Regression Summary Table***

Model	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Squares	F	Sig
Regression	47.39	13	3.65	3.04	.001
Residual	101.96	85	1.20		
Total	149.35	98			

- a. Dependent variable: Principals' intent to stay (question: "How often do you seriously consider changing your role to take a job outside of the role of k-12 principal?").*

Table 10***Model 1: Unstandardized and Standardized Betas***

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
<i>Model</i>		<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
1	(Constant)	.33	1.58		.21	.84
	AGE	.04	.17	.03	.25	.84
	GENDER	.08	.25	.03	.35	.73
	ETHNICITY	-.08	.13	-.06	-.56	.57
	POSITION	-.02	.29	-.08	-.79	.94
	YRSOFEXP	.10	.16	.08	.60	.55
	YRSLOWPERF	-.19	.17	-.08	-.72	.47
	SCHOOLPOP	-.21	.13	-.17	-1.65	.10
	SPS	.33	.12	.29	2.83	.01
	POVERTY	-.72	.13	-.13	-1.29	.20
	SALARY	-.26	.15	-.18	-1.79	.08
	SUPPORT	.06	.19	.05	.29	.77
	TASKSKILLS	.22	.20	.11	1.09	.28
	JOBLEARNING	.44	.18	.34	2.41	.02

A second regression model was conducted predicting principals' intent to stay as assessed by the item, "If you had a choice (i.e., district does not implement turnaround or transformational model of moving principal), how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal?" The regression results for the equation indicated that the overall model significantly predicts principals' intent to stay, $R = .591$, $R^2 = .271$; $F = 2.40$; $p < .005$. The model accounts for 27.1% of the variance in principals' intent to stay (see Table 11). Only on-the-job learning was a significant predictor of intent to stay (see Table 12). The school performance score did not emerge as a significant finding. The researcher believes this may be due to the question addressing their intent to leave any school and does not specify only low performing schools as the subsequent question did. The interpretation of this finding must be within the context of the multicollinearity that exists between key variables of Krumboltz's (1996) theory.

Table 11

Model 2: Regression Summary Table

Model	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Squares	F	Sig
Regression	67.99	13	5.23	2.40	.008
Residual	182.82	84	2.18		
Total	250.81	97			

- a. *Dependent variable: principals intent to stay (question: "If you had a choice (i.e., district does not implement turnaround or transformational model of moving principal), how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal?").*

Table 12***Model 2: Unstandardized and Standardized Betas***

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
2	(Constant)	.08	2.13		.04	.97
	AGE	.05	.23	-.03	-.21	.84
	GENDER	.08	.34	.03	.24	.81
	ETHNICITY	-.16	.18	.10	-.88	.39
	POSITION	-.29	.40	-.08	-.71	.48
	YRSOFEXP	.28	.22	.18	-1.20	.23
	YRSLOWPERF	-.19	.22	.09	.85	.40
	SCHOOLPOP	.02	.17	-.01	.10	.92
	SPS	.18	.16	.13	1.25	.21
	POVERTY	-.09	.18	-.05	-.48	.64
	SALARY	-.10	.20	-.05	-.50	.62
	SUPPORT	.24	.26	.15	.92	.36
	TASKSKILLS	.15	.27	.06	.55	.59
	JOBLEARNING	.49	.25	.29	1.96	.05

The final regression model used the set of independent variables to predict principals' intent to stay as measured by the question, "If you had a choice (i.e., district does not implement turnaround or transformational model of moving principal, how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal in your current school?" The principals selected 2 years or less, 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, or 6 years or more. Two years or less was coded 1 and 6 years or more was coded 5. The results of these regressions are presented in Tables 13 and 14. Again, the model taken as a whole was able to predict principals' intent to stay at a significant level, $R = .531$, $R^2 = .282$, $F = 2.52$; $p < .005$. A significant proportion (28.2%) of the variance in principals' intent to stay can be explained by the overall model although only the beta for SPS was statistically significant (see Table 14). The beta for formal learning experiences approached statistical significance ($p = .10$).

Table 13

Model 3: Regression Summary Table

Model	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Squares	F	Sig
Regression	47.51	13	3.66	2.52	.005
Residual	121.22	85	1.43		
Total	168.73	98			

- a. *Dependent variable: principals intent to stay (question: "If you had a choice (i.e., district does not implement turnaround or transformational model of moving principal), how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal in your current school?").*

Table 14***Model 3: Unstandardized and Standardized Betas***

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Mode		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
3	(Constant)	.31	1.73		.18	.86
	AGE	-.04	.19	-.03	-.21	.83
	GENDER	-.09	.28	-.04	-.34	.74
	ETHNICITY	-.07	.15	-.56	-.51	.61
	POSITION	-.17	.32	-.05	-.53	.60
	YRSOFEXP	.26	.18	-.21	-1.44	.15
	YRSLOWPERF	-.13	.18	.08	.71	.48
	SCHOOLPOP	-.20	.14	-.15	-1.43	.16
	SPS	.37	.13	.31	2.92	.01
	POVERTY	.06	.14	.04	.42	.68
	SALARY	-.02	.16	-.62	-.15	.88
	SUPPORT	.11	.22	.08	.52	.60
	TASKSKILLS	.08	.22	.04	.36	.72
	JOBLEARNING	.33	.20	.24	1.65	.10

Conclusion

Using regression analyses, the researcher was able to answer the research questions as follows:

1. Principals' intent to stay, as measured by three questions independently, could be predicted by (age, gender, race, job position, years of experience, years of low performance, student population, school performance score, poverty level, salary, support, task skills, and on-the-job learning) at a significant level ($p < .05$). Model 1 resulted in an overall R of .563 and R^2 .317, $p \leq .001$. Model 2 resulted in an overall R of .521 and R^2 of .271, $p \leq .008$. Model 3 resulted in an overall R of .531 and R^2 of .282, $p \leq .005$.

Table 15

Model Summary Table: 13 Predictor Variables

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1	Regression	47.39	13	3.65	3.04	.001
	Residual	101.96	85	1.20		
	Total	149.35	98			
2	Regression	67.99	13	5.23	2.40	.008
	Residual	182.82	84	2.18		
	Total	250.81	97			
3	Regression	47.51	13	3.66	2.52	.005
	Residual	121.22	85	1.43		
	Total	168.73	98			

- a. *Dependent variable model 1: How often would you consider changing your role to take a job outside of the role of K-12 principal?*
- b. *Dependent variable model 2: If you had the choice, how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal?*

- c. *Dependent variable model 3: If you had a choice, how long would you plan to stay in the role of principal in your current school?*

2. Standardized betas suggest the most important predictors of intent to stay. The following findings are concluded regarding contributions of individual variables:

- a. The perceived effectiveness by principals of the on-the-job formal learning experiences provided by their current employer/school board significantly predict principals' intent to stay such that the more effective the principal perceived training provided by their districts, the more likely they would stay.
- b. School Performance Scores significantly predict principals' intent to stay such that the higher-performing schools in this low-performing group tended to have principals more likely to remain.

The researcher concludes that personal and professional characteristics (gender, age, race, total years of experiences, and years of experiences in low performing schools) and principals' task skills and abilities as measured independently, did not contribute significantly to explaining the variance in principals' intent to stay.

Chapter Five

Introduction

Chapter 5 begins with a brief overview of the study, followed by a summary of the data presented in chapter four. These are followed by interpretation and discussion of the findings in relationship to each research questions, implications for policy and practice in education, recommendations for future research, limitations of the research, and conclusions.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of several independent variables associated with Krumboltz's (1990) social learning theory of career decision making (1) personal and professional characteristics (age, gender race, years of experience), (2) school environment (student population, grade levels, student poverty level, salary, effective district support), (3) learning experience (formal learning experiences), and (4) task skills (effectiveness of perceived ability on task skills)– on principals' intent to stay or leave the principalship in low-performing schools in Louisiana.

The guiding research questions for this study were:

1) To what extent do the four factors of Krumboltz's social learning theory of career decision making (personal characteristics, environment, formal learning experiences and task skills) combine to predict principals' intent to stay in the role of principal in a low-performing school in Louisiana?

2) What is the relative contribution of each of these factors in predicting principals' intent to stay?

Summary of the Findings

The results of this study suggest that a great number of principals are not intending to stay in the profession of principalship in Louisiana's lowest performing schools. Actually, sixty-four percent of the principals reported they are intending to leave the profession of principalship within the next five years. An overwhelming fifty percent indicated intending to remain 3 years or less when asked specifically about remaining in their current low-performing school. The extant literature supports that principals are not staying very long in the position of principal in several other states as well, particularly in lower-achieving schools (Demery & Palmiero, 2003; Militello & Behnke, 2006; Fuller & Young, 2009; Weinstein et al., 2009).

To understand what factors could predict any variance in the principals' intent to stay in the profession of principalship, multiple regression models were conducted using several predictor variables. Personal and professional characteristics of the principal as a predictor variable were measured using five questions items (gender, age, ethnicity, year of experience, years of experience in a low-performing school). Based on strong correlations of the Likert-type scaled items that were used to measure the predictor variables, on-the-job learning, task skills, and school environment, the researcher chose to consider these items as comprising three independent scales. The Cronbach alphas for these scales all exceeded .891 which indicated strong content validity. Any variables that had little to no variation were excluded from inclusion on subsequent regression analysis. These included certification level, degree level, previous positions held, grade levels, district type, and licensure program.

The overall regression models were statistically significant in predicting principals' intent to stay with the inclusion of all predictor variables. However, personal and professional

characteristics and task skills did not account for a significant portion of the variance in principals' intent to stay when they were individually assessed. There were two significant findings. First, on-the-job formal learning experiences did result in a significant outcome ($p < .05$). Second, school performance scores were able to account for a significant proportion of the variability in principals' intent to stay ($p < .05$). There were several ancillary findings that were worth mentioning in connection to understanding further the major findings. These will be discussed in the conclusion section of this chapter.

Interpretations and Discussion of the Findings

Professional Learning as a Predictor of Intent to Stay

According to the results of this study, principals are more likely to intend to stay in their positions if employers provide effective ongoing professional learning experiences for them. Most principals surveyed viewed the learning experiences provided by their employer/local school board as only *“somewhat effective”*, with a mean score of 3.62 on a scale of 5. The top three areas in which principals felt they received the most effective on-the-job learning experiences and professional development trainings from their employers were (1) data-driven decision making, (2) testing and accountability, and (3) curriculum and instruction. The principals indicated that these, in general, were specific trainings that were either *“neutral/not sure”* or *“somewhat effective”*. Parent and community support training provided by the employer or district members was rated lowest in effectiveness.

A historical view of on-the-job learning experiences for educators in Louisiana may shed light on the results of this study. Over the last 11 years, the state of Louisiana has required the use of continued learning for teaching staff to promote quality teaching in all academic institutions. There are required hours of Continued Learning Units (CLUs) for teachers each year that must be submitted to the State Department of Education in order for teachers to retain their highly-qualified licensure. Also, there have been a growing number of schools that have adopted *The System for Teacher and Student Advancement Program* (TAP) as a model for ongoing learning and professional growth for teachers. TAP requires a minimum of 60 minutes per week of instruction on best teaching practices by a Master Teacher. While “teaching the teachers” has been a mandated approach for professional growth within the teaching profession, similar requirements for continuous quality and quantity of on-the-job learning experiences for principals have not been implemented.

In Louisiana, a two-year Leadership Induction Program is required by the State Department of Education upon entering the first year of educational administration (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007). Initially, this program was implemented and monitored by state personnel members. As of 2011, the LDOE has authorized the district employees to provide this program for principals and report the completion to the state department for licensure purposes. The expected outcomes of the program are for leaders to be proficient and skilled in school improvement processes, school accountability and enhanced student achievement. After this two-year program is completed, any professional development for school leaders is left to the district or the school leaders themselves. With the explosion of accountability and curriculum demands, the question remains, who will train the leaders in a consistent, systematic, effective way to lead the reform movement, especially in lower-performing schools?

For the most part, the principals worked in high-poverty schools (88%) with medium- to-large school population sizes (67%). While school environment factors such as socioeconomic status and school size did not significantly impact these principals' intent to stay according to the findings of this study, the on-the-job learning experiences might be more critical for principals to be comfortable remaining in such challenging schools. Specifically, principals reported that additional training in testing and accountability and school improvement planning would affect their decision to remain.

More recently federal organizations and policy makers are beginning to aid in this process. In 2011, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee finished drafting a bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that details more focused support on professional development exclusively for principals (NAESP, 2012). The National Association for Elementary and Secondary Principals were advocates of this bill as they strongly believe that school leaders are at the helm of good schools and need to be recognized and supported through training (NAESP, 2012). The United States Secretary of Education, Arnie Duncan, articulated a similar focus on improving student achievement through educational leadership training and designed a new budget of 170 million streamlined for school leadership programs. The need for principal ongoing development is emerging as a priority action vital in improving schools.

While there is very little research existing on the impact of professional learning for principals on principals' intent to stay, there were a couple of studies in the literature that highlighted the need for on-the-job learning. One such study conducted was an ethnography that used three secondary level principals from El Paso, Texas. The principals were near retirement,

but decided to take an early exit from the profession. When asked the reasons why they left, there were several main themes that resulted: micromanagement by central office employees and superintendent, family dynamics and finally, *mentoring* was non-existent (Livingston, D., 2005). Another study used 125 principals to assess the impact of effective leadership programs on school achievement and climate. The results showed a moderate correlation between leadership programs and school's improvement progress and effective school climate (Orr, 2005). These studies support the findings that on-the-job learning is a valuable component in school improvement. Unfortunately, many times principals are isolated in schools to foster high achievement amongst staff and students, but not offered structured support through trainings to grow, ultimately effecting their decisions to stay or leave (NAESP, 2003).

Principal High Self-Ratings Reported for Task Skills

It is interesting that the principals' indicated high self-ratings for their leadership skills on particular tasks, despite the reported need for on-the-job training to assist in their career decisions to stay as principal in a low-performing school. Principal perceptions of their own abilities to complete certain leadership tasks were viewed by most principals as *“somewhat effective”* to *“very effective”*, with a mean score of 4.19 out of 5. Overall, they felt they were most effective in creating a safe and orderly environment, creating a vision, and using data for school improvement. They felt least effective in the area of parent and community involvement.

It makes common sense that the lower scores ($\mu=3.62$ out of 5) reported by principals in the area of professional learning experiences should have had some connection to the scores reported for their task skills and abilities. However, principals' leadership task skills and abilities were not found to have a significant impact on principals' intent to stay. This seems

contradictory to the finding that on-the-job learning experience does affect principals' intent to stay. A logical justification for the disconnect between on-the-job training perceived by principals as necessary and their perceived ability to perform certain leadership task at high levels of effectiveness could be that the ever-changing landscape of education reform makes principals uneasy about their futures. While they feel efficacious, they lack certainty about whether their current skill levels will adapt to new demands.

Another consideration is that principals' may be more concerned about feeling supported by their employers through the provision of district-level trainings than actually focusing on the skill increase that could result from the training. It is important to note that principals rated both their effectiveness and their district support based on their individual perceptions. The self-ratings of effectiveness may lead to socially desirable responses. If principals feel insecure in any area, it may be easier to say, "I need more training" instead of "I am not effective".

The School Performance Score as a Predictor of Intent to Stay

A second major finding for this study was the school performance score as a predictor of intent to stay, specifically in low-performing schools. The results of this study are consistent with the literature. Principals in lower-achieving schools intend to remain a shorter length of time than principals in higher achieving schools. Schools that are low-achieving have principals who remain, on average, 4.32 years as compared to high-achieving schools with 5.62 years (Fuller & Young, 2009). One study showed 80% of principals remained after 3 years of service in higher-performing schools as compared to 60% in the lower-performing schools (Horng, Kalogides, and Loeb, 2010). The finding of this study supports that there are more principals who have intentions to depart from their schools earlier if their school performance scores are low.

Testing and the consequences of low-performance are at the forefront of most educational conversations. With the new accountability mandates currently in place in Louisiana, the principals in this study cited stress (55%) as a top reason of three selected choices they would not remain for more than 5 years in a low-performing school. In addition, it has been reported in the literature that the standards for student academic achievement have been raised, often creating an environment of tension and stress for principals when their school's performance is rated negatively (Militello & Behnke, 2006). The role of the principal has definitely expanded to include more focus on school performance, testing, curriculum, data, and accountability and the demands for principals in this regard are constantly increasing. The descriptive statistics for principals' intent to stay indicated the pressure of testing as the second most cited reason they would leave the job of principal (42%). Thus, employers who provide the most effective training and support in these areas for principals might increase retention rates.

As a result of the school performance scores, the state department of education has been able to assign school performance labels that are partially used to hold principals accountable. The labeling of schools as Academically Unacceptable, Academic Watch, D or F could initiate a perception that is personally accepted by principals and other stakeholders to label the principal as a failure. It is important to understand that this possible belief regarding the "principal as failure" when the school is labeled a failure, is not substantiated with any additional qualitative or quantitative information for evaluating the principals' effectiveness. The school performance scores are published by the state annually and this judgment is typically made each year by stakeholders using the one data source.

Additionally, stringent timelines to increase scores ten, twenty or more points in just a few years or risk being terminated, helps to justify why principals' would intend to stay in their school such a short period of time. Research has shown multiple times the negative impacts of high principal turnover. We know from literature that the length of principal tenure is highly correlated to levels of student achievement, teacher retention, school climate, and school culture (Fullan, 2001; Mac Millan et.al, 2004; Vanderhaar et al., 2006; Weinstein et al., 2009). Unfortunately, the lack of stability in the profession of principalship could only reinforce low school performance scores (NAESP, 2009; Plecki et al., 2007; Weinstein et al., 2009).

Although district support and leadership task skills did not predict principals' intent to stay, two items from these scales were significantly correlated. District support was highly correlated to intent to stay in the area of curriculum and instruction. Also, the leadership's ability to increase student achievement was positively related to intent to stay. These areas, curriculum, instruction, and achievement, all are important to improving school performance scores. This only supports the finding that school performance scores were found to be a significant predictor of principals' intent to stay.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study are essential to improving policies and practices in educational leadership. They can be used to reinforce stronger retention rates of principals working in low-performing schools in Louisiana. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2007) indicated that nearly half of the nation's school districts surveyed reported a shortage of principal applicants. In many cases, candidates hold all the necessary certifications to become a principal, but are not willing to commit to such a challenging job, especially in schools that have

performed poorly on accountability measures (Fuller & Young, 2007). In Louisiana, a legislative education bill was proposed in 2012 to allow superintendents to accept principals with an out-of-field certificate if there were having difficulty locating a principal with necessary credentials. There are also proposals to allow removal of educators that do not meet performance standards for four out of five years. The inability to attract quality leaders, as well as retain the leaders we have, might be further exacerbated by these stressors.

The *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* signed into legislation in 2001 by President Bush initiated an accountability era for educators like never before encountered. NCLB requires that all children be provided a high-quality education despite any subgroup categories (i.e., race, gender, socioeconomic class, special needs, etc.). As a result, federal and state lawmakers have outlined strict action plans, including the removal of principals, if progress is not made. In Louisiana the number of changes in policy has been most aggressive as they try to meet the NCLB goal of 100% of students on or above grade level by 2014. Nevertheless, Louisiana is not close to reaching this mark, with over 50% of its schools below the targeted performance goal (LDOE, 2010).

While ensuring quality leaders in schools has been a major focus of federal and state legislators across America, they have not established a course of action for ensuring the highest level of on-the-job training that is necessary to retaining willing school leaders. The Louisiana State Department of Education (LDOE) should consider the design and implementation of a strategic plan for providing continual support and development for the school principal. The LDOE could delegate these responsibilities to the independent school districts. However, they must require the plan of action for professional development to remain within state guidelines for

quality and minimum hour requirements. The educational practice of providing on-the-job learning experiences at the most basic level should include a large proportion of trainers with extensive leadership experience and effectiveness ratings to provide the training. These trainings should not be sporadic, but outlined in an ongoing professional development plan to support and develop the most effective leaders.

Another consideration of lawmakers should include the assignment of most experienced principals to schools with higher socio-economic levels and of moderate size. The principals who work in larger and poorer schools often encounter significant obstacles such as lack of student motivation, low academic levels, low parent involvement, and low levels of funding. Education policies must provide more resource support to schools with high poverty levels and larger school sizes rather than just implementing punitive measures for failure to progress.

There are additional practices and policies at the district level that also should be implemented based on these findings. As it relates to school performance scores, districts should provide the highest level of human and financial resource support to the schools with the lowest-performance. When a school can be documented as having enormous socioeconomic or academic challenges, it seems inequitable to equally distribute these resources to schools or make competitive funding a viable option. A deficiency in resource capital does not lend the principal in making fast improvements in the school.

As a standard for evaluative practices of school leaders, there should be at various points within the school year a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the school principal. The evaluation should use of multiple data sources before deciding to move a principal within a three to five year timeframe. It is not good practice to use one data source to evaluate performance. It

would be more reliable to assess the principal using a survey from their superintendent, students, parent, and teachers, four observations conducted by trained evaluators, and data from standardized test scores from several academic years. This process would create a fair model for measuring a school leaders' effectiveness.

Finally, labeling by the state is unavoidable. However, in spite of the assigned label, the general district practice should include strong public relations that can report all positive and negative aspects of the school by using the multiple sources of data. Regrettably, perception is often mistaken as reality. It should be the district's role to provide a holistic depiction of the progress of the school. The school performance score is published each year by the state department of education solely by itself. The information provided does not detail the trend data for the schools' achievement levels, changes in leadership, mobility of student, school size, socioeconomic status of students, etc. Thus, it would be critical for the district to highlight other characteristics of the school that could positively enhance the public's perception. It is a very heavy weight on the principal, who may have only been at the school for one year, to publically be associated with only negative aspects of the school, potentially igniting a series of early departures.

For professional on-the-job learning, the general practice from districts should include at a minimum, mandatory monthly trainings that are provided by experts in the field, a total number of hours of training, and an individualized growth plan for each principal. Also, it is important that districts provide funding for principals to attend out-of-state trainings that can support the learning necessary to promote the needs of the school. Also, principals should be provided opportunities to conduct out-of-state school site visits to ensure they can create school

environments that complete globally. These suggestions for slight changes in policy and practice could assist principals in their career decisions to remain when it is influenced by the school performance scores and on-the-job learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered for continued research in this area:

1. Conduct a comparative study of principals' intent to stay working in high-performing schools versus low-performing schools. This could actually include various levels of higher performing and lower performing schools by comparing a school in *Academic Watch* status with a school in *Academically Unacceptable* status or *Two Star* school with an *Academic Watch* school. It could also include an examination of the years of experience of the principals serving in these schools with various achievement levels. The results of this study showed 72% of the principals who were serving as leaders in lower-performing schools in Louisiana had no more than 10 years of experience total as a principal in any school. Moreover, 65% of these principals had no more than five years total serving in a lower-performing school. Viewing the perspectives of the principals working in these different contexts could offer insight into what will be needed to reform practices and policies to retain principals for longer periods of time based on the achievement levels of the school.

2. Conduct a longitudinal review of the LDOE database for patterns of principals moving and leaving since Hurricane Katrina to gauge the mobility and retention levels of principals in Louisiana. This information could help discern the impact of mobility on school achievement levels.
3. A qualitative approach such as face-to-face interviews and focus groups could be used to understand deeper the impact of school environment, district support, leadership task skills and ability, testing and accountability and stress of the expanded role of instructional leaders on retention levels of principals. The ability to address in depth the more recent policies driving Louisiana school reform today would offer some insight into additional factors that may influence principals' decisions to leave or stay.
4. For this study, parent and community involvement was rated least effective for trainings provided by their employer/school board by principals. Also, they reported this as the area they perceived their leadership abilities as least effective. A quantitative study to examine the relationship between parent and community involvement and intent to stay, accountability, and school performance scores may further give insight into why principals' would decide to stay or leave the profession of principalship in a low-performing school.

Limitations of the Research

The results of this study are limited by the following:

1. The researcher made several attempts to attain a high response rate for this study. However, the response rate at 57% may not represent the population sufficiently to make

sweeping generalizations to school leaders across Louisiana in schools that are deemed Academically Unacceptable or under Academic Watch.

2. The study focused on low-performing schools that were labeled Academically Unacceptable or Academic Watch. The results do not generalize to principals of higher-performing schools.
3. The use of only low-performing schools yielded a group of participants with low diversity in gender, race, and age, again limiting generalizability to other groups.

Conclusions

This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that play a role in the intention of principals to remain as principals in low-performing schools. The perspectives and experiences of 125 principals who have led schools that were low achieving for a minimum of one academic year were summarized from the data. A review of the literature shows consistent issues across several states in America in retaining school leaders, especially in low-performing schools. The descriptive statistics for the dependent variable, principals' intent to stay, confirm these findings; that the majority of principals in this study do not intend to stay as principal in a low-performing school longer than three to five years.

The study was guided by Krumboltz's social learning theory for career decision making that categorizes four specific influencers as factors that contribute to individuals' decisions to stay or leave a career. This study hypothesized that, collectively and/or independently, these specific influencers would impact the principals' intent to stay or leave the profession: personal and professional characteristics, school environment, formal learning experiences, and task

skills. The results of the study indicate, as an overall regression model, age, gender, race, years of experience, years working in low-performing schools, poverty level, student population, salary, school performance level, district support, leadership, school environment, on-the-job learning, and task skills, did significantly predict principals' intent to stay. When the four influencers were assessed independently as predictors of intent to stay, one influencer (learning experiences) was found to have major significance on the dependent variable. As suggested by Krumboltz's theory, learning experiences do have an influence in regards to individuals' career decisions based on the findings of this study. However, the other three influencers guided by Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making were not supported for this particular study. Specifically, the influencers, school environment and personal characteristics may have not been supported in this study due to the low variation in responses for the areas of gender, age, race, years of experience, years of experience in low-performing schools, degree levels, certification levels, poverty levels, school size, salary, and district type. Principals' task skill/ability most likely was found not to be a good predictor of principals' intent to stay due to the of the high self- principal ratings of their effectiveness in this area.

There were two major finding for this study. Principals' perceived effectiveness of formal learning experiences received by district level employees or school boards and school performance scores significantly could predict principals' willingness to remain in the position as principal. Suggestions to improve educational practice and policy include structured on-the-job trainings for school principals and a more comprehensive evaluative system to assess principal effectiveness.

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Appendix A



CONSENT FORM

1. Title of Research Study

Factors Impacting Principals' Career Decision Making

2. Project Director

Wylene Sorapuru

Principal, William J. Fischer Accelerated Academy

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(504) 913-1157 or wmsorapu@uno.edu*

*In partial fulfillment of course requirements under the supervision of Dr. Brian Beabout,
Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University
of New Orleans, LA 70148 (504) 280-6721 or bbeabout@uno.edu*

3. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence the principals' intent to stay in the role of principal in an Academically Unsuccessful School. The findings will aid in changing practices that increase retention rates of principals.

4. Procedures for this Research

This research will be conducted using a Principal Intent to Stay Survey. The survey will consist of 25 questions that address principal retention, biographical information, work history, and recruitment and support.

5. Potential Risks of Discomforts

The researcher does not foresee any risk to the participants. Participation is completely voluntary and you will not encounter any harm if you choose not to complete the survey.

6. Potential Benefits to You or Others

The findings in this study could help to inform district personnel about various practices that could help to improve levels of principals' retention. This research could benefit many principals to gain knowledge on what areas of principalship may need to evolve to retain effective leadership.

7. Protection Confidentiality

All the data collected will remain anonymous. Names of participants will not be necessary or required. Only this researcher and the project director will have access to the data collected from this survey. The data file will not contain any person or identifying information about the participant or their school. All data collected through the use of surveys will be destroyed once the data is entered.

8. Consent to Participate

You have been fully informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks. Please contact me or my advisor listed in section #2 of this letter if you have any questions about the study. Please retain this letter. If you would like to participate, please complete the survey and submit it to your school site administrator. By completing the survey you are indicating your willingness to participate in this study.

Appendix B



December 20, 2011

Greetings Fellow Colleagues,

My name is Wylene Sorapuru, and I am currently in my sixth year of doctoral studies at the University of New Orleans in Educational Administration and Leadership. I would appreciate if you would allow me to conduct a study of *Factors Impacting Principals' Career Decision Making* as assessed by principals in Louisiana's schools.

As a former school teacher-leader of six years in an urban elementary school and a current Principal at William J. Fischer Charter School, I am conscious of the many difficulties we face as leaders educating our students. Research shows that the job of the principal has become so massive and complex that often it becomes ~~more~~ "more than one person can handle". Additionally, job-stress is considered as the number one reason a principal candidate would not enter into principalship. Post-Hurricane Katrina, principals in the Louisiana area in particular are challenged with facilities issues, lack of student records, and social and economic concerns of their students, teachers, and parents that cannot be paralleled to any other district at this time. Finally, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 created an accountability requirement that many principals have been confronted with quickly improving the achievement levels in an Academically Unsuccessful School. Through this study, it is my intention to find factors that influence the principals' decisions to stay in the profession.

I am requesting your assistance in reviewing the enclosed consent form and online survey. Please do not include any identifying information. Names of participants are not necessary and surveys will be included anonymously. Your participation is voluntary. The survey consists of 25 questions and should take approximately five to ten minutes to complete. Data collected is for the sole purpose of examining the factors that influence principals' intent to stay. No individual data will be reported.

If you should have any questions or concerns, please contact me or my advisor, Dr. Brian Beabout, at the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University of New Orleans, LA 70148 (504) 913-1157 or email wmsorapu@uno.edu.

Thanking you in advance.

Sincerely,

Wylene Marie Sorapuru

Encl: Survey Cover Letter

Survey

APPENDIX C

Survey Use Email Confirmation: sent Monday, July 20, 2009 6:55 p.m. from matt_militello@ncsu.edu (email copy on file).

Wylene:

Great news on the progress of your dissertation.

The findings from the survey have been accepted for publication at the Journal of Research on Leadership Education (JRLE). Should be coming out this fall.

I have attached the manuscript-- there is not much on the construct of the survey-- you might find some of this useful. In essence, we constructed a survey based on the extant literature and then conducted some interviews to test items.

FYI- I am now at NCState.

Good Luck,

Matt

APPENDIX D

***University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research***

University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Brian Beabout

Co-Investigator: Wylene Sorapuru

Date: September 7, 2011

Protocol Title: Low Performing Schools: Principals' Intent to Stay or Leave the Profession of
Principalship

IRB#: 08Aug11

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that the information obtained is not recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair

UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

VITA

The author was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. She obtained a Bachelor's degree in education from Southern University of New Orleans in 1999. She completed her graduate studies at the University of New Orleans in 2003 obtaining a Master level degree in the area of educational leadership. She began her service as a school administrator in the Orleans Parish Public School system beginning in 2005. During her tenure, she has partnered to open three charter schools and served as primary coordinator of several district-wide initiatives. She continues to lead as principal at William J. Fischer Charter School in the city of New Orleans. She entered the University of New Orleans in 2005 to pursue a PhD in educational leadership and administration and intends to extend her role in the educational field as higher education professor.